RONNIE LANE REMEMBERED

# Guitar & Bass

## 25 Ways To Upgrade Your Strat

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**John Mayall**
G&L Fallout
**Babajack**
Vintage
**and more...**

**New Burns and Blackstar ID:Core reviews**

**Private Collection**
The highs and lows of building a bass camp

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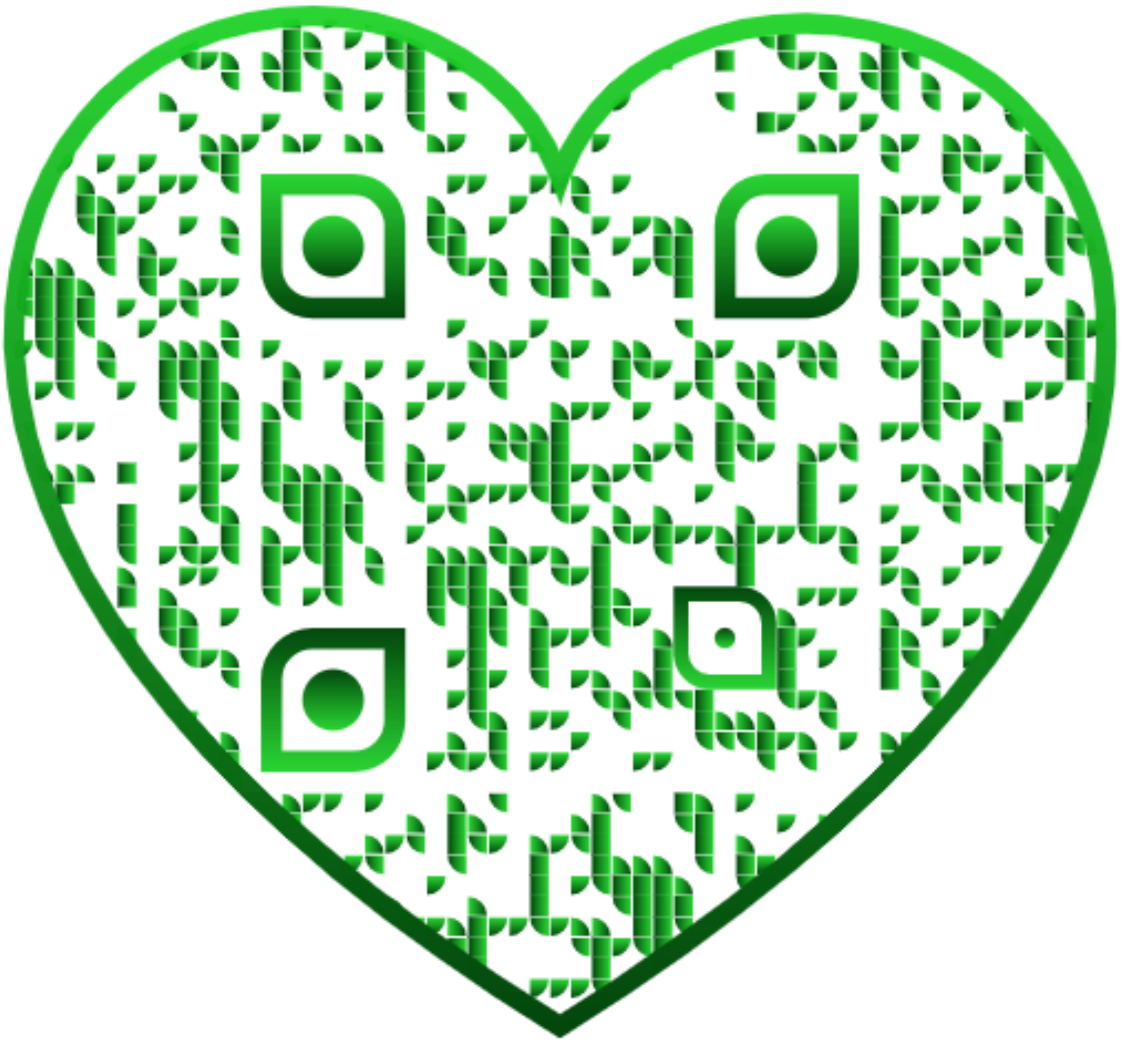

CADILLAC IN MODEL "A"
THE WORLD IS YOURS
THAT'LL BE THE DAY
PEGGY SUE
BABY BLUE
LA BAMBA
APACHE
LET'S GO TRIPPIN'
TRICK BAG
WALK, DON'T RUN
MISIRLOU
I FOUGHT THE LAW
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HELP ME RHONDA
NOWHERE MAN
PURPLE HAZE
FIRE
ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE
KICK OUT THE JAMS
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ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER
THE NIGHT THEY DROVE OLD DIXIE DOWN
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WHAT IS LIFE
LAYLA
SMOKE ON THE WATER
REELIN' IN THE YEARS
SUPERFLY
THAT LADY
YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET
SWEET HOME ALABAMA
MONEY
TOO ROLLING STONED
DIXIE CHICKEN
MAGIC MAN
CARRY ON MY WAYWARD SON
WALK THIS WAY
FREEWAY JAM
BEAST OF BURDEN
BAD PENNY
FLY LIKE AN EAGLE
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LE FREAK
MY SHARONA
LIMELIGHT
COMFORTABLY NUMB
RUN TO THE HILLS
MANEATER
ELEPHANT TALK
LENNY
PRIDE (IN THE NAME OF LOVE)
OWNER OF A LONELY HEART
CUTS LIKE A KNIFE
ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER
BIG LOG
YOU GIVE LOVE A BAD NAME
BLACK STAR
PRIDE AND JOY
SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER
FINISH WHAT YA STARTED
SLOW TURNING
SEE A LITTLE LIGHT
SMOKING GUN
TUFF ENUFF
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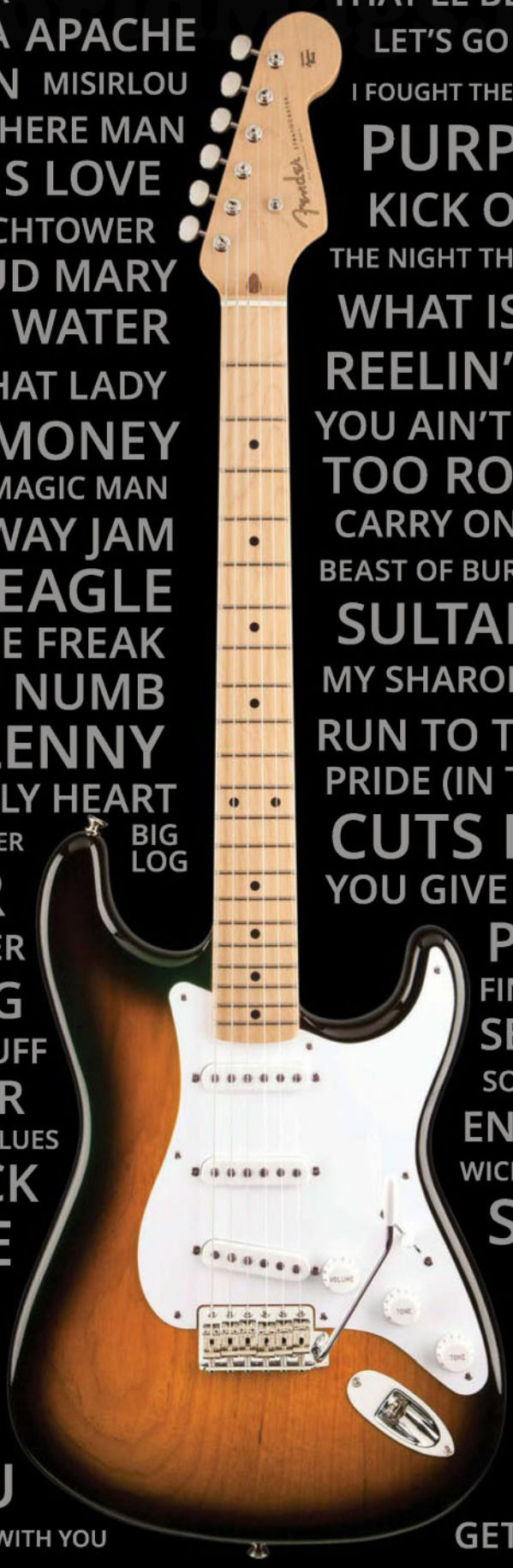
ENDLESS, NAMELESS
DAMN RIGHT I'VE GOT THE BLUES
WICKED GAME
COMEDOWN
BLUE ON BLACK
SWALLOWED
SCAR TISSUE
ALIVE
NO RAIN
BULLET WITH BUTTERFLY WINGS
SHOW ME HOW TO LIVE
DAMMIT
LAST NITE
MAPS
GRAVITY
DIVINIATIONS
ABEL
I BET YOU LOOK GOOD ON THE DANCEFLOOR
'TIL SUMMER COMES AROUND
FORGET YOU
BEVERLY HILLS
WHO WOULDN'T FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU
GET LUCKY
BLACK CHANDELIER

STRATOCASTER 60 YEARS 1954 2014

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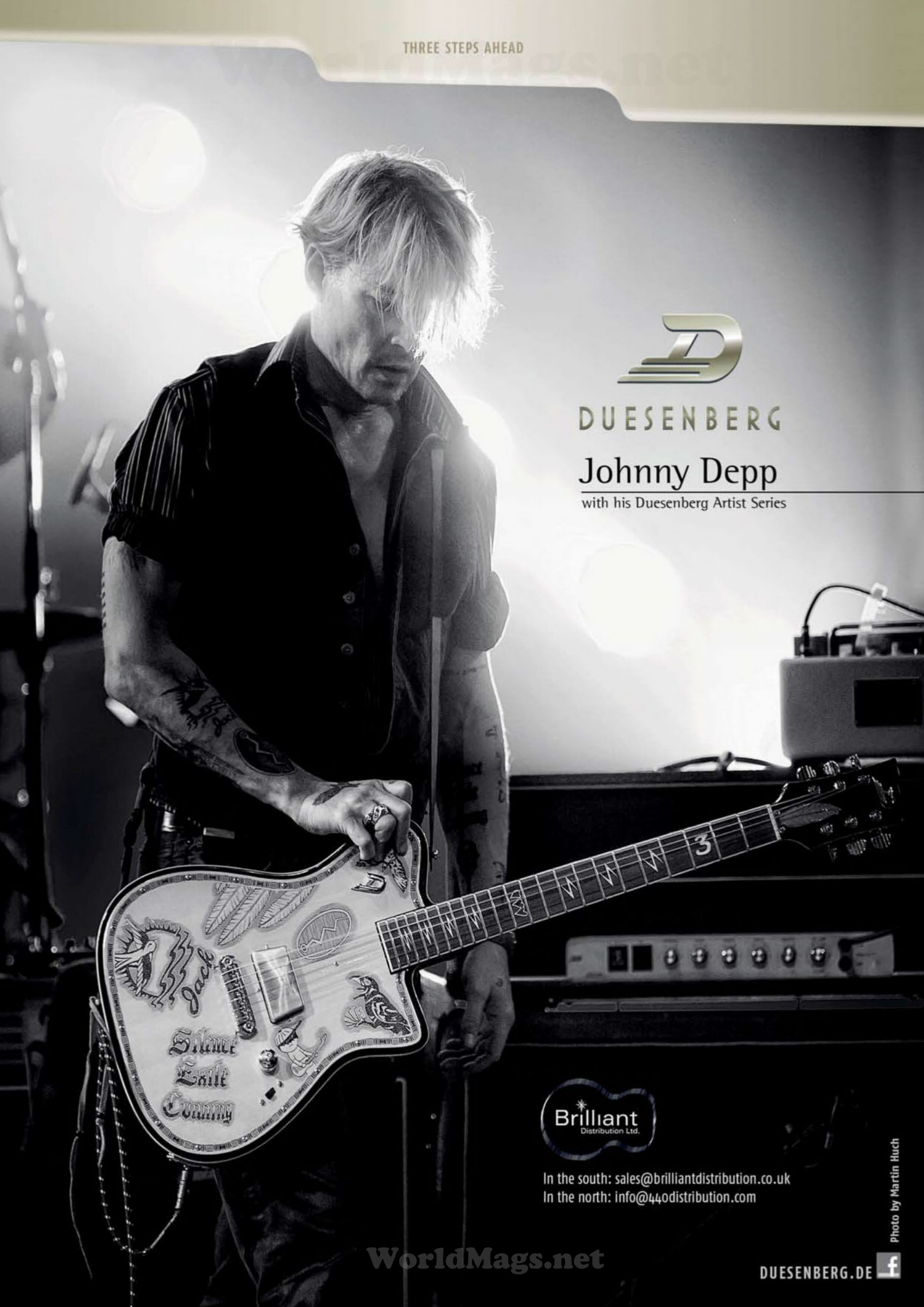


DUESENBERG

# Johnny Depp

with his Duesenberg Artist Series

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Photo by Martin Huch

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# *Make do and mend...*

Under the right circumstances, we're not frightened of being called 'old-fashioned'. This month's cover story was born from a lot of guitar players' experiences. You love your Fender Strat, but in some ways – maybe the sound, or the playability – it isn't quite cutting it. You could get yourself another guitar; that's a perfectly fine option. However, what if you love your current Strat so much you'd rather keep playing that one? That's where our cover story comes in. If you've ever done anything to your guitar yourself, you'll know how sweet the feeling is, and our suggestions for upgrades are designed to inspire you to go and get that feeling again. Trust us, it can really raise your love of guitar-playing to new levels.

And that's not close to being all in this issue: within our reviews section this month lies the *G&B* verdict on gear from Blackstar, Burns and Crafter, among many others. We salute the musical genius of Ronnie Lane and John Mayall, feature a bass guitar collection that's out of this world, and offer advice and tips on everything from left-handed vintage guitars to prog rock playing. We hope there's plenty for guitar-lovin' souls to enjoy, and that it will sustain you (along with our website: www.guitar-bass.net) until the next issue arrives. Good luck with all your guitar endeavours...

John

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**SAVE 35%**
**& receive a free set of Elixir strings when you subscribe**
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# Reverberations

Write to *Guitar & Bass*, Anthem Publishing, Station House, Station Approach, off North Street, Carshalton, SM5 2HW or e-mail us: guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com
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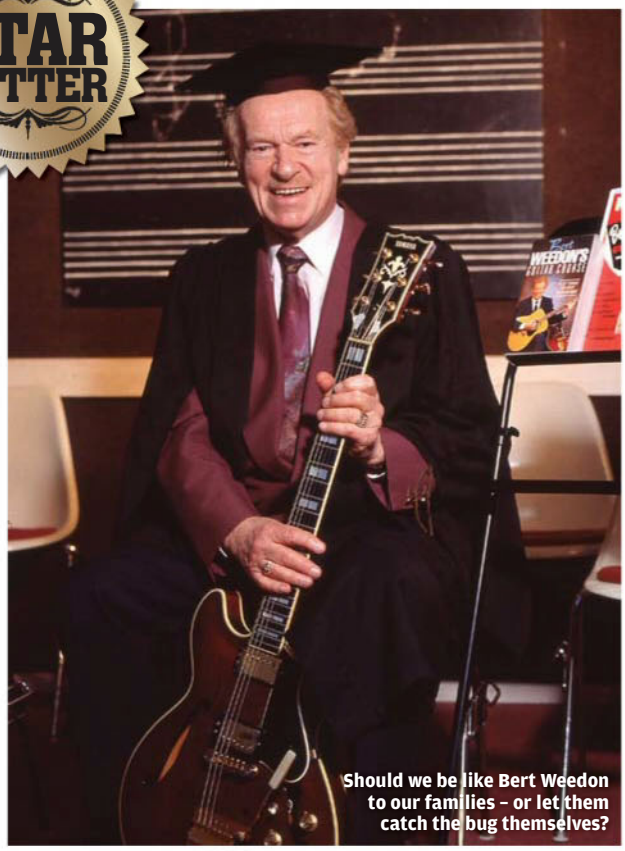
STAR LETTER



Should we be like Bert Weedon to our families – or let them catch the bug themselves?

Rosetti

Written a Star Letter? Contact Rosetti on 01376 550033 to claim your Rickenbacker goodie bag

## PASSING ON THE BATON?

**Having been a guitar lover and player since I was a wee boy, I always thought if I ever had children that I'd teach them to play. I even had some notion about playing in a band with them. I'm now the proud father of three boys – aged 17, 11 and 7. With my eldest, I gave him a little old battered acoustic when he was in primary school and let him make as much noise with it as possible. I even encouraged him to smash it, if the mood took him. When he was a bit older, I offered to show him some basics and get him his own proper guitar. None of it worked, and he remains to this day as uninterested in the guitar as it's possible to be. I spent many a sleepless night worrying whether I'd pushed it on him too much, or not enough, and decided that – in the same way my parents didn't have interest in music and neither encouraged nor discouraged me – I'd leave my middle son be. However, he's started asking me about my guitars and whether he could have a go on them. The youngest remains blissfully unaware of the guitar, for now at least. I'm in a real dilemma here: I love all my sons equally, but it would be fantastic to teach at least one of them how to play and follow in his old man's footsteps. However, I don't want to come on too strong or push him too far, for fear of scaring him off. What do you think I should do?**

**Dave Cosgrove** *via email*

***G&B*** **We appreciate the mental anguish you feel, Dave. I think we've all at one time or another tried to persuade someone close to us just how wonderful the guitar can be, only for it to fall on deaf ears. We're not claiming expert knowledge, but a possibly wise course of action is to encourage him to come to you when he wants to, and make sure he keeps enjoying it. We're willing to hear arguments otherwise, and we wouldn't admonish parents who have sent their children to lessons. Lessons are a great opportunity for a child to learn the instrument, and all education is a good thing. We just feel that the worst thing that can happen is that children can get put off music for good by making it seem like work. Sure, learning an instrument teaches concentration, discipline and perseverance and we're not recommending that you tell a child to quit at the first thing they find difficult. One of the great things about guitar is the ability to learn informally. If your child gets the bug and starts screaming for lessons, fantastic; if they don't, then that's fine. That said, so much depends on the individual child that the only real advice is to do what you think is best in their interests. Good luck, and if anyone else out there has their own experiences about teaching their children to play guitar they'd like to share, please get in touch.**

## MYSTERY SOLVED

I would like to thank you for resolving a 29-year-old mystery that has been confounding me for the last, well, 29 years!

I bought my first guitar from a school mate in April 1985 for the princely sum of £5. I had to pay in instalments as I only got £1 pocket money each week, but it proved to be the best fiver I have ever spent, and going without comics and sweets for just over a month was not a huge hardship. I had no idea what make the guitar was, and I couldn't see any identifying marks. It was essentially Strat-shaped, finished in a black and red sunburst, with a whammy arm that was just a length of flat metal held on by a nut and bolt. It had two pickups, each with its own slider switch – just like Brian May's to my naive mind, which made it extra cool as he was the reason I started playing in the first place. It had three knobs and a front-mounted jack socket all presented on a tortoiseshell scratchplate. The bottom of the headstock had been shaved off and fashioned to a point, similar to an arrowhead. I imagined that is where the name would have been, thus perpetuating its anonymity. The guitar was easy to play, and I feel fortunate that I was spared the torturous route of the 'cheap old acoustic with a warped neck and inch-high action'

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that so many new players have to contend with. This nameless guitar made my first forays into chords and scales a relatively painless experience, but, with hindsight, has made my fretting hand a bit of a wimp! Of course, this nameless beauty was to be eventually replaced by a selection of Hondos and Hohners before I purchased my first 'real' guitar, a Gibson SG, three years later.

Over the years I have often wondered what brand that guitar was, and eventually decided it was a Kay Strat copy, a conclusion reached purely by conjecture. I have never seen another one since to help aid identification... until I turned to page 96 of the May 2014 edition of your magazine, and there was one of its cousins staring back at me. After all this time, I can now proudly state that my first guitar was a Teisco Sakai Top Twenty. The one in Alan Rideout's collection was identical to mine (apart from the damaged headstock), and I have spent far too long gazing at the photograph like a soppy fool and basking in the glorious waves of nostalgia. Happy times. It saddens me to admit that my Top Twenty was probably the victim of a voracious clear-out in the early '90s when I left home, ending up on the local tip.

At last the mystery has been resolved, and I know it sounds daft, but it is really satisfying to finally put a name to the face, as it were, and I would like to thank Alan for sharing his collection. I am now off to have another flick through the May issue, but for some reason it seems to naturally fall open at page 96!

**Richard Smith** *via email*

***G&B*** **Even if it's only inadvertently, we're delighted help solve the mystery. If it has gone to the big guitar shop in the sky, we're sure your Top Twenty still has some fond memories you playing it.**

## FORWARD NOTION

I feel that I should write to tell you about a thought I have recently had. I had a talk with a friend who told me, 'What would you possibly do with a seven-string? You could just tune your guitar down or something.'

I was struck by her words and I realised that many guitarists today seem to be sticking with old styles. Perhaps the guitar world needs to open up to unconventional ideas, like having an extra one or two strings on a guitar. New techniques, too, and new ways of using things like the whammy bar (as mentioned in you cover story in the last issue). Of course, it's all well saying this, but to apply this is another matter. Still, I do admire the new thinking some players do. Music would be boring if it was all the same, so there would be nothing better in my opinion than to find a new way of music making on the instrument that formed the basis of it all.

**Angus Grierson** *via email*

***G&B*** **We're all for progress and innovation, Angus, as long as it doesn't get in the way of the music, and that players themselves can choose what's comfortable for them. We see more and more guitar players turning to things like seven-strings, using alternate tunings and incorporating technology in their sound. If you see what was possible when the electric guitar was invented and what is possible now, it's obvious that many great strides have been made. As always, it's up for the individual to decide – one player might want to shake things up by adding an extra string, another by using an alternate tuning, a third might just employ a stompbox. We're sure that as long as players keep striving to get better the instrument won't stagnate.**

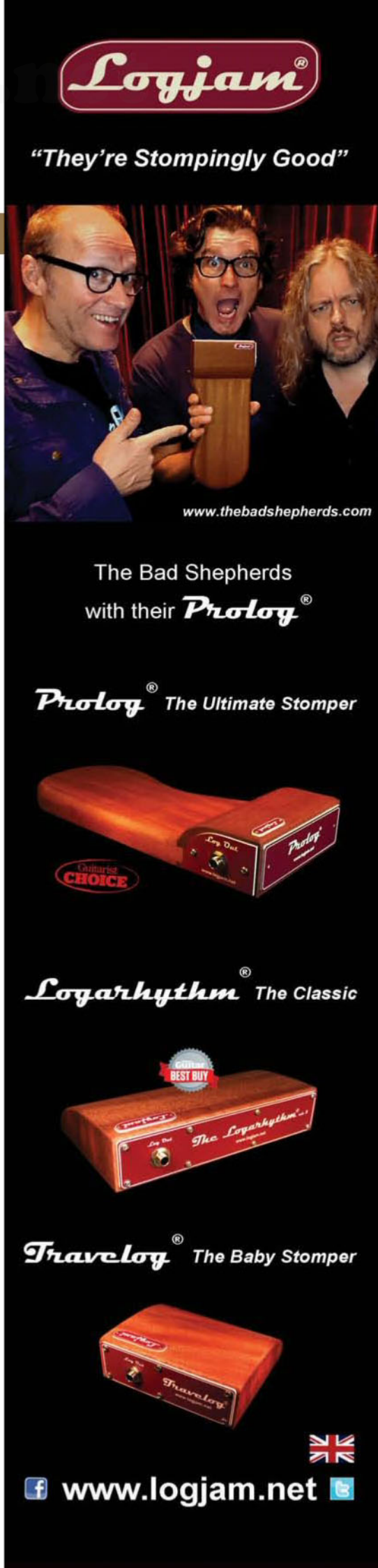
## BAND AID

Just recently I banged one of my fingers up at work, and while it isn't a serious injury it does hamper my guitar playing considerably. Today as I was playing away and struggling to make some kind of agreeable sound, I was reminded of the *Star Letter* in the Jan 14 issue where Jimir comments about the often dreaded ordeal of trying out a guitar in front of people in a shop.

I too have had many uncomfortable moments in this situation but I think my injury has provided me with a solution. From now on if I think I might be giving a guitar a test run at some point during the day I'll just pop a plaster on a finger or two and I have an instant excuse for having the 'guitar shop fumbles'. How's that for turning a negative into a positive, eh?

**Bill Webb** *Australia*

***G&B*** **For a split second we were a bit worried that you were going to recommend pretending that the guitar you were playing in the shop was the cause of the damage in an attempt to sue the shop. We apologise profusely for the very idea, and want to state categorically that that would be a bad thing to do. However, your actual idea demonstrates admirable ingenuity and fortitude. It's so good, we might switch from our usual shaking out the fretting hand while complaining about a touch of RSI from playing too many gigs recently – our usual course of action when mucking up a guitar part in public.**



# Woke up this mornin'... NEWS

# Fender Sells Guild

The famous American brand finds a new home in the country of its birth, but there's no word yet on which models will survive...

Iconic 60-year old guitar brand Guild, which has been owned by the Fender Musical Instruments Corporation for the last 19 years, is to be sold to the Cordoba Music Group, respected US maker of acoustics and ukuleles. Back in 1961 the Guild range included an archtop dubbed the Cordoba X-50, which was essentially a relaunched version of one of the very earliest 1953 Guild models, so for guitar aficionados Cordoba may well represent a befitting new proprietor.

Guild was founded by guitarist Alfred Dronge in New York in the early '50s and almost immediately benefited from Epiphone's relocation to Philadelphia, picking up many of its disgruntled former workers. Players like Duane Eddy, Johnny Smith and Bo Diddley were early electric endorsees while the company's flat-top acoustics like the F-50 attracted equally esteemed players and also undercut the cost of equivalent Martin models. Electrics like the semi-solid Starfire, upmarket Stuart X-500 archtop and SG-esque S-100 kept the brand strong as did the introduction of its dreadnought D-25 and D-35 and its sought-after acoustic 12-strings in the late '60s. Unfortunately Dronge was killed in an aeroplane crash in 1972, and by the end of the decade the company was floundering.

Sales were boosted by the launch of a string of Brian May 'Red Special' style signature models and a range of George Gruhn-designed acoustics throughout the '80s, but that didn't stop Guild changing hands on number of occasions before finally being adopted by Fender in 1995.

No reason is given for Fender's sale, although there is a family connection as recently retired Fender CEO Larry Thomas is the father of Jonathan Thomas, president of Cordoba. The current Guild facility in Connecticut will be closed and the guitars will now be built in Oxnard, California.

## It's Official: Guitarist's Brains Are Different

**Scientific research has revealed that guitarists can effectively read each other's minds. Players' neural networks synchronise, not only while playing a piece of music together, but also even slightly before playing. Researchers hooked up 12 pairs of players to a brain-scanning machine whilst they soloed together, and found that the subjects temporarily deactivated the region of their brains that routinely shuts down when achieving big-picture goals, signalling a shift from conscious to unconscious thought. Novice guitar players and most other musicians cannot do this. Scientists think it might be down to the fact that many players don't read music and learn and react from watching and listening to others. We always knew your minds were special...**

## HARRISON RICKY FETCHES $657K

**The 1962 Rickenbacker 425 that George Harrison played during the Beatles' first TV performances on *Ready Steady Go!* in October of 1963 and on *Thank Your Lucky Stars* a couple of months later has sold at auction for a staggering $657,000. Julien's Auction House hosted the Beatles-themed 'Rock Icons' sale at Times Square's Hard Rock Café in New York with a host of rare memorabilia up for grabs, and the Ricky – which George also played on the recording of *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* – was the star of the show. George bought the guitar while on a visit to see his sister in the US and had it refinished from Fireglo to black to match John Lennon's 325.**

## Line 6 AMPLiFi FX100

**The Bluetooth-controlled AMPLiFi amp impressed during *G&B*'s recent review and now the floor version brings that technology to the stage and rehearsal room. The AMPLiFi offers all the modelling amps, effects and guitar sounds of Pod fame and allows you to use your iPhone, iPad or other IOS device to visually build signal chains on the screen. This very smart unit will even match the tone of your favourite guitarists automatically from any tune in your device's music library. Price: £229. See www.line6.com.**

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# GIBSON ARCH ADVENTURES

Gibson has launched a trio of plush archtop models. Left is the 2014 Trini Lopez ES-335, an authentic recreation of Trini's original mid-'60s signature complete with diamond soundholes and the six-a-side headstock that found its way onto the non-reverse Firebird. Also from Gibson Memphis is the Rich Robinson 1963 ES-335 (far right); the Black Crowes man's original '63 was damaged in floods caused by Hurricane Sandy in 2012, so Gibson built him a replacement. The neck is a little thinner than a standard '63 but otherwise it's a faithful copy, complete with his favoured Bigsby. Finally, from Gibson Custom we have the very first double-cut L-5 (right). Designed by Lloyd Loar in 1922, the L-5 was the very first six-string with f-holes. It seems that even the oldest of designs can keep on evolving.

## Reclaimed Fenders

**Fender has found a fine use for some aged timbers with its new Reclaimed Series. The Reclaimed Eastern Pine Strat and Tele are made from wood originally used to build a dairy barn in Lake Odessa, Michigan in 1868. Beneath dark satin lacquer stain the knots, gashes, dings are all left unconcealed. Necks and fretboards are rosewood; the Strat has three Custom Shop Fat '50s single-coils while the Tele has a Texas Special in the neck and a Custom Shop Broadcaster at the bridge, with four-way switching. The Reclaimed Old Growth Redwood Stratocasters (far left) use timber from bridges built in 1933 spanning Walker Basin Creek and Caliente Creek, just east of Bakersfield, California. The maple necks are capped with rosewood while pickups are two American Vintage '65 grey-bottom single-coils and a Diamondback humbucker at the bridge. See www.fender.com.**

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### TC Electronic Toneprints Minis

**Pedals are getting tiny these days, and TC is in on the act. Newly shrunk are the Shaker Mini Vibrato, Corona Mini Chorus, Vortex Mini Flanger (all £85) and Flashback Mini Delay (£99). The Toneprint system allows you to download effects from the TC website and feed into your pedal via USB, so the tonal possibilities are huge. One of the latest is a new Brian May signature chorus for the Corona. Go to www.tcelectronic.com to see more.**

### Guthrie Backs Tronical

**After being adopted by Gibson, Tronical's self-tuning systems hardly need more endorsement – but if famously meticulous shredder Guthrie Govan is impressed, it all adds to the profile. 'I installed this system on my acoustic,' Govan reveals, 'and can confirm that it's a fast and foolproof way to switch accurately between tunings. It's definitely more than a mere gimmick.' The TronicalTune can be fitted to most guitars with no routing. See www.tronical.com.**

### EHX Big Muff Deluxe Pi

**It seems there's a new version of the Big Muff every year, but the Deluxe does offer something different. In addition to Volume, Tone and Sustain there's a Mids section, foot-switchable via the new expression pedal socket; a Frequency knob to centre the frequency of the EQ; and a Level to set the amount of boost or cut. A High/Low Q switch adjusts the bandwidth, Attack adds punch and clarity, and the Gate control kills noise and hum. There's a Bass Boost switch too.**

## Calendar SHOWS, GIGS, FESTIVALS, WORKSHOPS

### Matt Schofield

**10-11 JUNE**

**One of the UK's finest blues guitarists showcases his fantastic new *As Far As I Can See* album**

WHERE? **London, Newcastle and Manchester**

TICKETS **From £15**

CONTACT **www.mattschofield.com**

### Eric Clapton

**21-22 JUNE**

**Rumours abound that Eric is considering retiring from touring, so catch him while you can**

WHERE? **Glasgow Hydro and Leeds Arena**

TICKETS **From £57**

CONTACT **www.ericclapton.com**

### Hop Farm Festival

**4-6 JULY**

**Ray Davies, Squeeze, Bellowhead, Dr John, Nick Lowe, Brian Wilson, Joanne Shaw Taylor, Babajack**

WHERE? **The Hop Farm, Kent TN2 4NE**

TICKETS **Weekend with camping £165. Day from £68**

CONTACT **www.thehopfarmmusicfestival.com**

### Blues On The Farm

**19-22 JUNE**

**The Blues Band, Moreland & Arbuckle, Royal Southern Brotherhood, Babajack, Dana Fuchs**

WHERE? **Appledram Farm, Chichester PO20 7EH**

TICKETS **Weekend £129, camping £10 per night. Day tickets: Thurs £28, Fri-Sun £36**

CONTACT **www.bluesonthefarm.co.uk or call 01243 773828**

### Maryport Blues Festival

**25-27 JULY**

**Coco Montoya, Danny Bryant, the Nimmo Bros, Eric Sardinas, Laurence Jones, the Union, Rosco Levee**

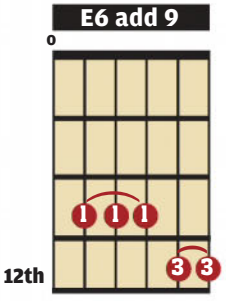
WHERE? **Maryport, on the coast of Cumbria just outside the Lake District**

TICKETS **Weekend early bird £60, day from £30**

CONTACT **www.maryportblues.co.uk**

## The Lost Chord

Try using this rich-sounding E6 add 9 in place of an Emaj7 to add a little – well, actually a lot – of extra spice if you find yourself at the dusty end of the neck. You'll find the sweet chime backed by that low E will shimmer nicely. Use the third or second finger for the B and E strings; up to you.

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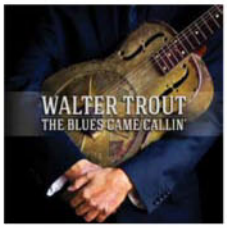
# Album reviews

## Walter Trout
**THE BLUES CAME CALLIN'**
**Provogue**

In normal circumstances, celebrating your 25th anniversary as a solo artist would be top of your agenda. However, given his serious health issues (he's currently waiting on a liver transplant) you'd forgive Walter Trout for not being on top form. Not a bit of it; the veteran bluesman has obviously channelled his torment into his latest cuts and the result is an essential album worthy of any in the great man's canon.

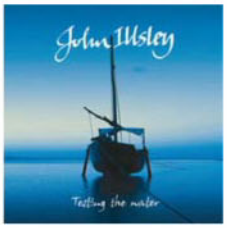



## Rich Robinson
**THE CEASELESS SIGHT**
**The End**

For all the Black Crowes' success, it always seemed that guitarist and songwriter Rich Robinson wasn't overly enamoured with arena-level stardom and all its accompanying shenanigans. So it's no surprise that his third album, although not a million miles away from the Black Crowes, is an intimate and loveable roots'n'rock mix that gets better with each listen. It is also further evidence that Robinson is a consummate player.

## John Illsley
**TESTING THE WATER**
**Creek**

Illsley has recently revealed he's been battling leukaemia for a decade and a half, and that some of the songs on *Testing The Water* were written while in hospital. From the opening riff with its marriage of teardrop electric and acoustic motifs, you'll hear that the former Dire Straits man still knows how to tug at the old heartstrings. Ably assisted by Robbie McIntosh, this album veritably oozes class.




## Eric Johnson
**EUROPE LIVE**
**Provogue**

Even Johnson's few naysayers would admit that the instrumental legend can play the heck out of a guitar, and when Johnson claims that working on this live record has inspired his performances then you know you're in for a treat. Put together from various performances across Europe, Johnson fans are treated to golden oldies such as *Cliffs Of Dover* as well as tracks taken from his forthcoming record.

## Mick Simpson
**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**
**Mad Ears**

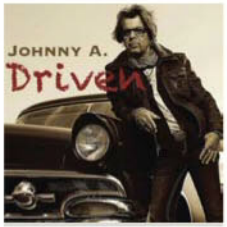
Despite having played with a number of music greats (and being feted by many more), Mick Simpson didn't release his first solo album until 2010. We're guessing that's where the whole notion of the album's title comes from: as from the opening bars of *Trouble Brewin'* to the last refrains of *Drowning In My Tears*, Simpson sweeps you off your feet and wrings you dry with his evocative mix of blues and rock.

## KXM
**KXM**
**EarMusic**

George Lynch is reportedly proper stoked at his new musical alliance with Korn drummer Ray Luzier and King's X singer Doug Pinnick (the 'K' and 'X' to Lynch's 'M' – from the 'M' in Lynch Mob). And so he should be – we've all heard too many supergroups where the technical chops surpass the actual tunes, but Lynch's melodic ideas and sense of timing makes this a great modern rock record.

## Johnny A
**DRIVEN**
**Aglaophone**

The Gibson signature artist's third solo album sees the man truly turn into a one-man band, playing all the instruments as well as producing and engineering. As he takes is through one high-octane groove after another, dropping the tempo slightly for a lovely re-working of the Bee Gees' *To Love Somebody*, you can't fail to realise that there's something very special about Johnny A's guitar tone.

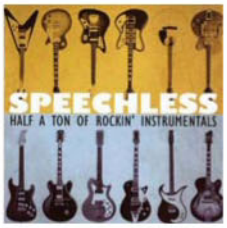



## Peter Frampton
**HUMMINGBIRD IN A BOX**
**Red/Sony**

This new mini-album features music inspired by the Cincinnati Ballet. Composed and produced by Frampton and Gordon Kennedy, this is a late-night special of a record. Most of the time it's all delicate melodies and laidback rootsy refrains, although Frampton does some more muscular fretwork on *The One In 901*. We can't comment about its suitability as music for ballet, but we can attest that it's a pretty absorbing collection.

## Various Artists
**SPEECHLESS: HALF A TON OF ROCKIN' INSTRUMENTALS**
**The Western Star**

The rock'n'roll guitar instrumental has often been seen by your average ignoramus as a novelty thing, but this collection from the last decade shows what a broad and life-enhancing musical experience it can be. Boasting cuts from the likes of Howlin' Wilson, Chuck & The Hulas and the Wolftones, these instrumentals go from slick and sinewy to eerie and echoey to downhome'n'dirty, all in a flick of the pick.




## SNAP JUDGEMENTS

### Hat Fitz & Cara Robinson
**DO TELL**
Manhaton
**Aussie blues veteran Fitz teams up with wife, Irish chanteuse Robinson, for an emotive set fuelled with old-time rootsy charm**

### Coco Montoya
**SONGS FROM THE ROAD**
Ruf
**Recorded over two performances at the Triple Door in Seattle, the former Bluesbreaker delivers big-time with plenty of trademark fretwork**

### Polly And The Billets Doux
**MONEY TREE**
Bleak Mouse
**An eclectic mix of blues, country, folk and jazz, all served up in a very refreshing and idiosyncratic British manner. Fine stuff**

### Radio Moscow
**MAGICAL DIRT**
Alive
**For those of a psychedelic blues-rock persuasion, Radio Moscow return with nutritious riffage and some rather tasty use of a wah-wah pedal**

### Royal Southern Brotherhood
**HEARTSOULBLOOD**
Ruf
**Get on some shoes that can handle some bluesy foot-stompin', as the Brotherhood, fronted by Greg Allman's son Devon, give it loads**

### Wilko Johnson
**THE BEST OF WILKO JOHNSON**
Cadiz Music
**A sound so lacerating shouldn't sound so warm, but Wilko manages it. An excellent intro to the man's brand of R&B guitar genius**

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**Stewart Hurwood** - Walter Becker

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**Bill Kelliher** - Guitarist for Mastodon

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**Mike Clement** - Toni Iommi & Iron Maiden

"It is an amazing little box. With all the tubes I go through on the road with Fleetwood Mac, it has become one of my most valuable tools. I've used it to test and match over 500 tubes so far in the few months I've owned it."

**Drew Foppe** - Fleetwood Mac & Deftones

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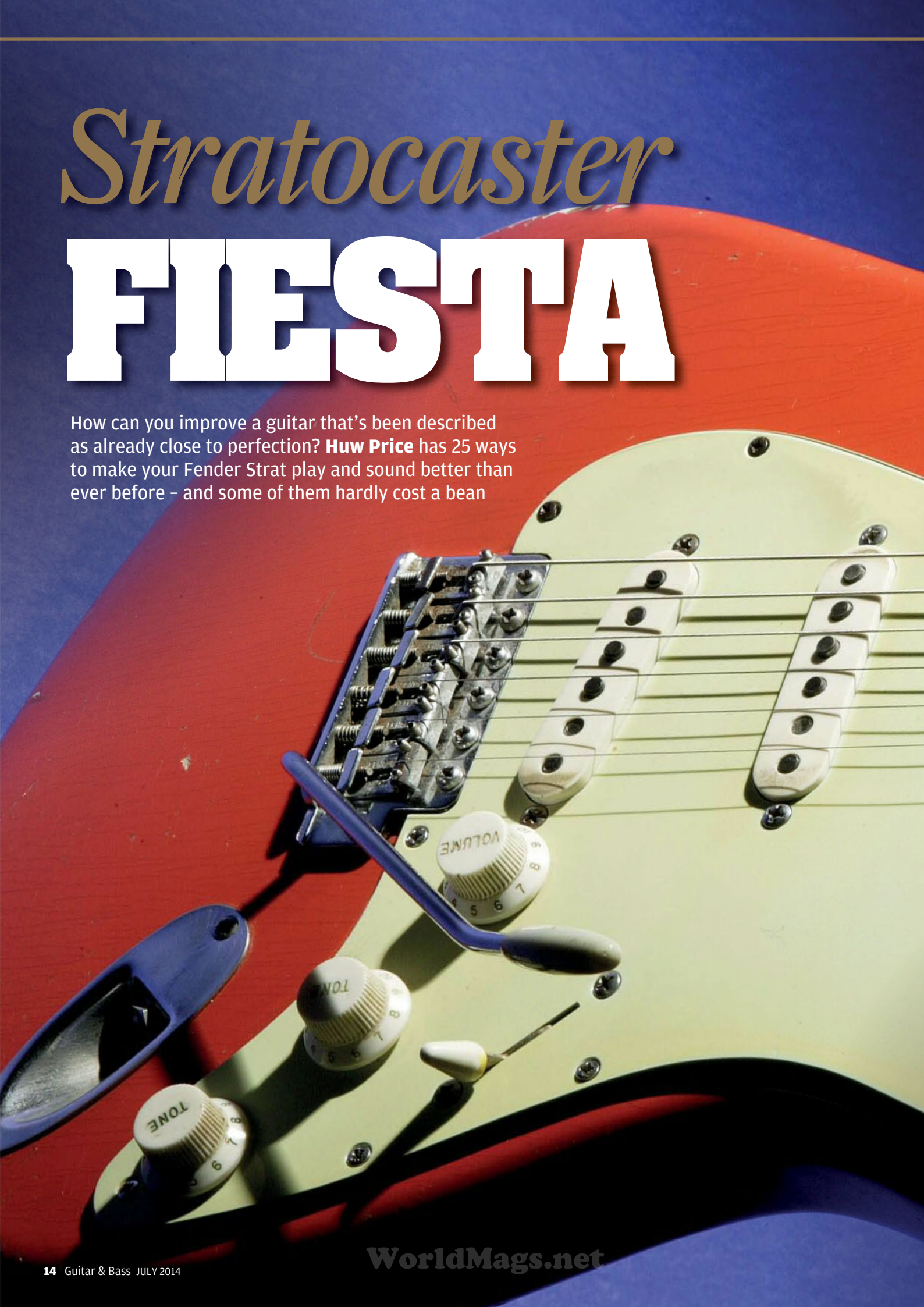
# Stratocaster FIESTA

How can you improve a guitar that's been described as already close to perfection? **Huw Price** has 25 ways to make your Fender Strat play and sound better than ever before – and some of them hardly cost a bean

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There was a time when vintage Fenders were thought to sound superior to newer ones simply because they were old, and most players were content to leave it at that. As the prices of vintage Fenders went stratospheric, the guitar community began to ask why the old ones sounded different. Could those characteristics be replicated with newer instruments?

Well, maybe, yes. It became apparent that various changes had been made to Fender's manufacturing methods and materials. In retrospect, 1965 was not 'year zero' for Fender because these changes occurred gradually – even if most were instigated by CBS bean-counters.

Pickups and woods have been subjected to close scrutiny, but only now are players becoming aware of the significance of seemingly minor electronic components, plus bridge blocks, saddles and nut materials. And it's not all about vintage tone; a proper understanding of the way the component parts fit into the formula will help you to make informed decisions about the modifications that will make your Stratocaster play and sound the way you want.

The purpose of this *Guitar & Bass* article is not to list all the fabulous aftermarket accessories and relic'd plastics that you can solder into or screw onto your Fender Strat. The emphasis is on optimising the basic instrument, and many of these modifications won't cost you a thing. Others are relatively cheap, and we'd advise you to investigate all the options before spending big money on exotic parts... because with a few judicious tweaks, a bit of basic wiring and some routine maintenance, that old Strat may yet surprise you.

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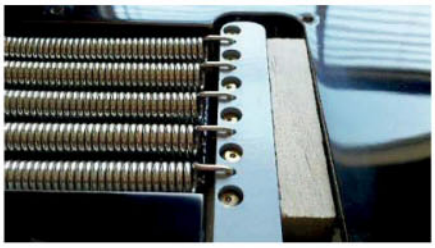
## 1 BLOCK THE BLOCK

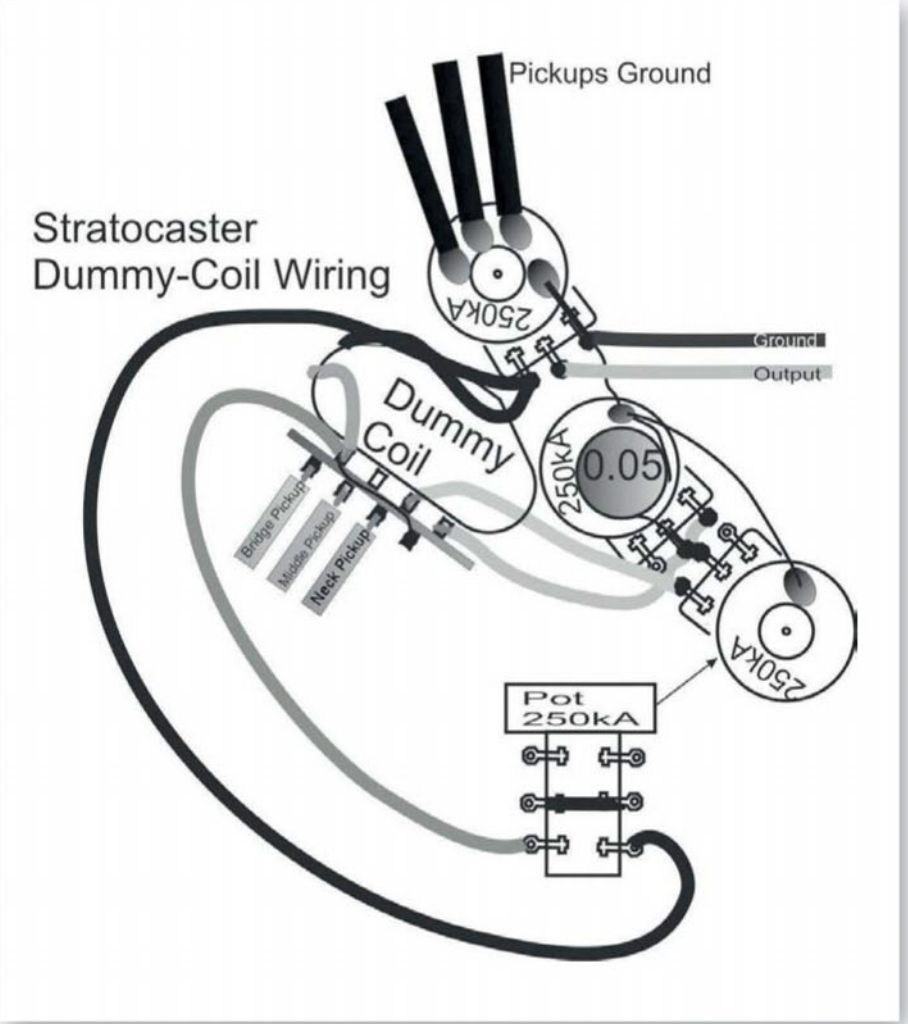
Some Strat players never use the vibrato – Robert Cray and Billy Gibbons prefer hardtail Strats – but most consider the springs to be an essential component of the guitar's sound. So how can you have a trem-loaded Strat that you can be tuned up in a single pass and won't go out of tune when you snap a string? Simple: tighten the spring claw, place a lump of wood between the bridge block and the back of the trem rout, and slacken off the claw to allow string tension to wedge it in place. It's simple, it's cheap, and it works. Just ask Eric.



**Not a trem fan? Using five springs, tightening the spring claw and wedging a piece of wood behind the block will give you hardtail tuning stability with spring-loaded tone.**

## 2 BEAT THE BUZZ

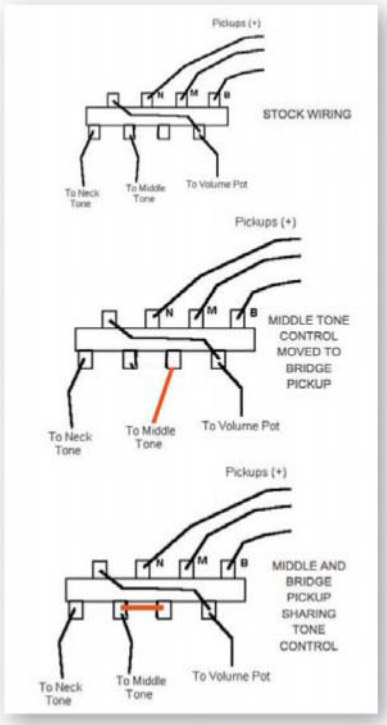
All guitars with single-coil pickups are prone to picking up noises, and Stratocasters will buzz and hum depending on the environment. Fortunately, there are ways to quiet things down. The simplest is to fit a RWRP pickup in the middle position, but this will only hum-cancel in positions 2 and 4. Some advocate lining the pickup and control routs with copper foil. Allparts sell sticky-backed copper, but you have to join all the edges with solder because the adhesive is non-conductive. Many pro players have installed dummy coils, and they feature in some Suhr models; you can remove the bar magnet from the underside of a cheap pickup and use it as a dummy coil. Ultimately, though, the only sure-fire way to silence a Strat is to install noiseless pickups such as Lace Sensors or Kinmans.




**The suggested position for a dummy coil connected to a regular Strat circuit with an in/out switch.**

## 3 BRIDGE TONE CONTROL

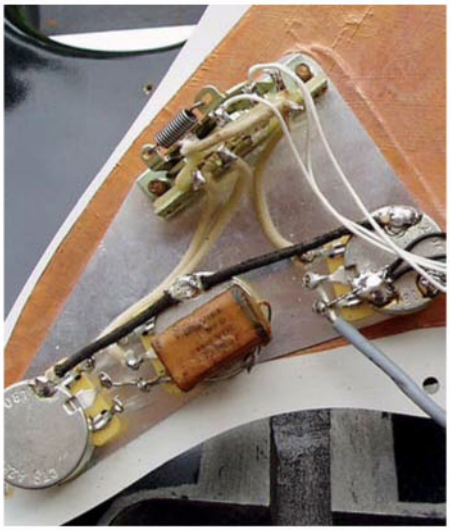
**Many have wondered why Fender chose to provide tone controls for the neck and middle pickups but neglected to provide treble roll-off for the pickup that actually needed it most. It's easy to remedy this oversight, and if you can solder, it shouldn't cost a thing. Method 1 is to swap the middle (or neck) pickup's tone control to the bridge pickup; method 2 is to add a jumper wire so the bridge pickup can share one of the other tone controls. Problem solved.**




**To connect the bridge pickup to a tone control, most modders move the middle tone control connection over or use a jumper for the bridge pickup to share the middle tone control.**

## 4 CAPACITOR VALUE

Pickup upgrades are often an attempt to sweeten the sound, but most of us overlook the tone capacitor. Fender initially installed 0.1uF caps – firstly paper/oil types, then later ceramic discs. Around 1964 the cap value was changed to 0.047uF. Treble is always lost through tone circuits – even when they're supposedly off – so the capacitor value is significant. A Strat will sound brighter with a 0.047uF cap than a 0.1uF. If you're chasing 'vintage tone' it's worth spending 20p on a 0.1uF capacitor before spending £200 on a set of pickups. If you want your Strat to sound brighter, try a 0.022uF cap.



**This is a reproduction of Fender's original paper/oil 0.1uF capacitor. The treble will sound vintage-correct with this value – or you can fit a 0.047uF or a 0.022uF for extra brightness.**

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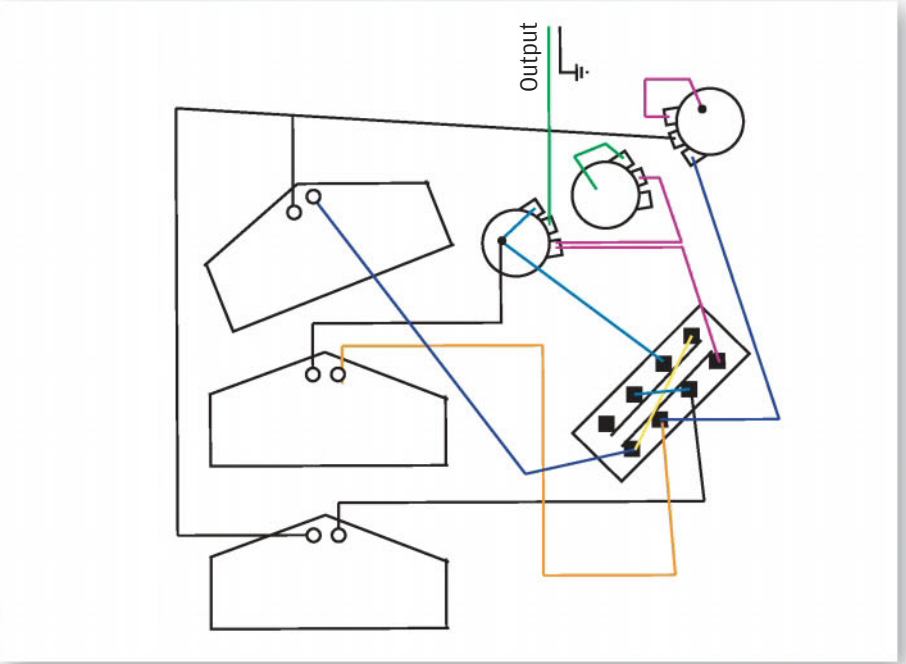
## 5 DAN ARMSTRONG WIRING

Dan Armstrong devised a parallel/series wiring mod for Strats that uses the 'middle' tone control as a blender/mixer. With the blend control at 10, you get all five regular pickup settings. When it's rolled fully back you get a H/S/H configuration – the middle pickup combining in series with the neck and bridge in the front and back positions.

These pseudo-humbucker settings are fatter and louder while settings 2 and 4 are genuinely out of phase. You can explore semi-series and semi-out of phase tones as well, because there's a blender rather than a switch. The new layout is simple to operate and if you're content with master volume and tone, it's a great way to use that spare control.




**This Dan Armstrong mod provides four extra tones, with pseudo-humbuckers in the neck and bridge. It sounds fantastic, it's easy to use, and your guitar's appearance remains unchanged.**

## 6 SWINGING ARMS

Over time vibrato arms can become loose. If they develop too much play then they rattle back and forth when you use them, causing noise and making it harder to achieve a smooth vibrato – and you can certainly forget about Jeff Beck levels of precision. There are a couple of tried and trusted remedies, though. Some players like to drop a small spring into the bottom of the arm hole in the block so that as the arm is tightened it presses against the spring and feels a bit more stable. Another popular fix is to wrap PTFE tape around the arm thread. You can buy this tape from plumbers' merchants and it's very cheap – which is just as well, because the tape will need to be refreshed every so often. For a more permanent solution, check out the innovative trem arm from the UK's Staytrem.

**Some well-placed tape can tame a loose tremolo arm – but you'll need to replace it often.**

## 7 HEIGHT ADJUSTMENT

The term 'Stratitus' is used to describe the odd-sounding tuning anomalies many Strats exhibit on the low E string as you play above the 12th fret. This is caused by excessive magnetic pull from the pickups inhibiting string vibration, and pickups that are set high will make things worse. Don't assume that your Strat came out of the factory adjusted to perfection – the proximity of the coils to the strings has a significant effect on tone. Set the pickups high and they'll make your Strat sound bright, loud and aggressive; set them lower and the tone should open up, with sweeter trebles and more dynamic response. Set them too low, and your Strat will sound dull and lifeless. All three pickups have height-adjustment screws and they're there to optimise tone and balance the levels of the pickups. Let your ears guide you.

**The pickup height adjustment screws are there to be used. If you're nervous about doing this, attaching a small piece of masking tape to the ends of each cover and marking the pickguard level with a pencil will allow you to return easily to your original settings.**

## 8 INDUCTANCE PLATE

Turning Telecasters into Tele/Strat hybrids is common enough, but fewer players have attempted to Tele-ise their Strats with a replacement bridge pickup – Lowell George being an honourable exception. These days it's a cheap and easy mod that requires a metal inductance plate to be attached to the underside of a regular Strat bridge pickup. These can fatten, focus and generally beef up your bridge pickup tone. Steel plates sound different to copper and so forth, so do some research beforehand to decide what appeals to you. Suppliers include Fralin, Shed Pickups, Singlecoil.com and Oil City.

**An inductance plate will make your Strat's bridge pickup sound more like a typical Telecaster. They're cheap and easy to install.**

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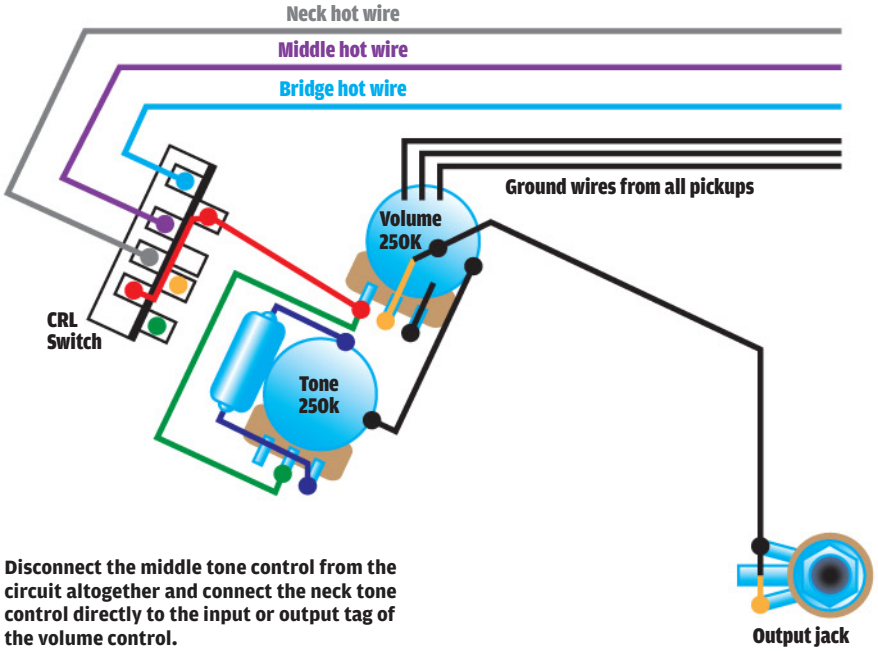
## 9 LUBRICATION

Friction is the enemy of stable tuning. This has been well understood for decades, and excellent results are achievable with traditional petroleum jelly and graphite from soft pencils. Other DIY solutions include silicon grease, Chapstick and 'O' ring grease, while specialist guitar products include Big Bends Nut Sauce, Graphit All and many more. Although they all do much the same job, the guitar products are designed for accurate and mess-free application. Potential sticking points include nut slots, the point where the strings contact the saddles and beneath the string trees. Lube up as part of your string-changing routine.

**Big Bends Nut Sauce is a popular guitar lubricant. The syringe and micro brush make it simple to apply and it might help to keep tuning solid.**

## 10 MASTER TONE CONTROL

Strat players have long struggled with over-bright bridge pickups, prompting aftermarket pickup makers to devise 'balanced sets'. Many deliver, but the underlying cause is not addressed. Stock Strat pickups *are* balanced, but the stock circuit isn't, as only the neck and middle pickups bleed treble through the tone circuit. Changing to a master tone arrangement is a simple modification that 'balances' the treble response of the pickups and frees up the second tone control for trick wiring. If you connect the master tone control to the output (centre) tag of volume control rather than the input, the ratio of guitar signal to treble bleed remains consistent regardless of the position of the volume knob. Many find it renders treble bleed capacitors superfluous – and you can try it on your Tele too.

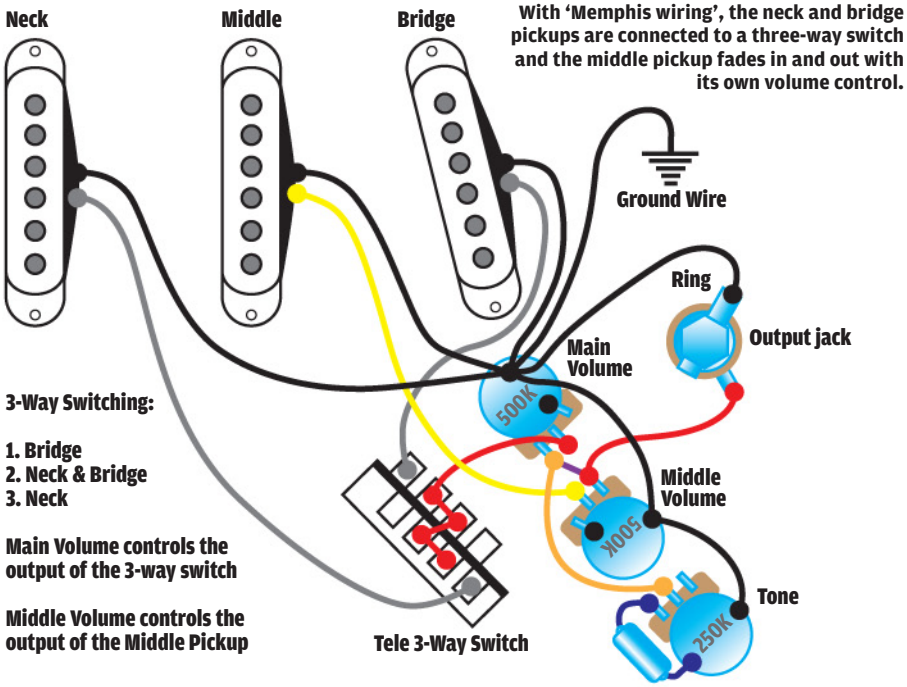



**Disconnect the middle tone control from the circuit altogether and connect the neck tone control directly to the input or output tag of the volume control.**

## 11 THE MEMPHIS WIRING TRICK

In the days of three-way switches, players were aware of the Strat's in-between settings but it was hard to make the switch stay put. Here, the middle pickup is disconnected from the volume control and the switch, leaving a Tele-type neck/both/bridge arrangement with master volume and tone controls. The spare tone control becomes the middle pickup's volume. You can still have all your regular Strat settings plus all three pickups in parallel and a great sounding neck/bridge combination. It's known as 'Memphis Wiring' because this was the preferred configuration of Sun Records legend Roland Janes.

**With 'Memphis wiring', the neck and bridge pickups are connected to a three-way switch and the middle pickup fades in and out with its own volume control.**




## 12 NUT JOB

Friction is the cause of most tuning problems, and rough nut slots are a common source of friction. Listen for clicks and pings from the headstock area as you tune up. Budget Strats often come with plastic nuts, which aren't good for tone or tuning; why not consider upgrading to bone or a self-lubricating graphite nut from Graphtec? Trem king Jeff Beck prefers a roller nut, but standard nut slots must be altered to fit one. If you already have a bone nut, try wrapping a length of string with 1200 grit wet and dry paper and smoothing the slots. After protecting rosewood fingerboards with masking tape, buff the nut and slots with chrome polish.

**Roller nuts are popular with heavy vibrato users because they provide a friction-free ride. The drawback is that in order to fit one, the nut slot will need to be widened.**

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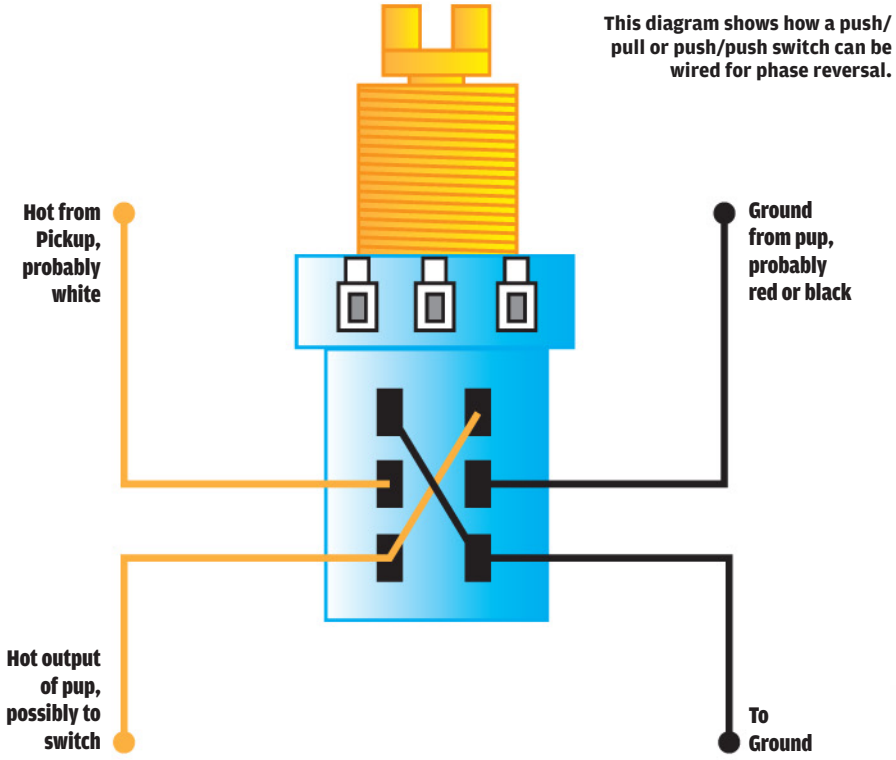
## 13 OUT OF PHASE SWITCHING

Although the in-between settings are often referred to as 'out of phase', it's really two pickup coils working together in series. There's a degree of phase shift because they're picking up string vibrations from different areas of the string, but the pickups are actually in phase electronically. True out of phase switching means reversing the positive and negative connections of one pickup. Individually the pickups will sound the same, but in combination the thinner, scratchier, honkier sound is useful for getting clean sounds high in a mix without eating up too much frequency space. It's a tone heard on funk and old Motown records, and it can be brutally lo-fi through a fuzzbox.




This diagram shows how a push/pull or push/push switch can be wired for phase reversal.

## 14 PICKUP UPGRADES

We believe a pickup upgrade can provide the biggest improvement of all, but it shouldn't be regarded as a cure-all – there are easier and cheaper upgrades that you should perform first. Vintage tone enthusiasts may want scatterwound coils and they should check out the various types of alnico and slug staggers Fender used in different eras. Formvar magnet wire was used prior to the CBS takeover and plain enamel thereafter. All these things make a difference. Hot wound single coils and drop-in humbuckers with coils in stacked and side-by-side configurations will make your Strat far more powerful. Drop-in P90 soundalikes are also available, as are low-output Danelectro-style lipsticks.

Single-coil sized dual rail pickups such as DiMarzio's Air Norton S solve hum problems and boost output, without extra routing.

## 15 NECK POCKET CLEANUP

To resonate together as one, the body and neck of a guitar should be coupled as tightly as possible. Wood-to-wood contact is ideal – but this isn't the way things generally turn out. Pop the neck off most Strats and you'll often find various horrors in the pocket. A shim is often needed to achieve an optimal neck angle, and it's accepted practice, but rubber grommets, cardboard and scraps of sandpaper are not ideal. Try a sliver of hardwood veneer if you need to shim. Many necks have labels and stickers in between the screw holes. Peel them off and clean up any residual stickiness. If you're spraying a body, consider masking of the neck pocket so the wood remains exposed.

We recently found this plastic cut-off in the neck pocket of a Strat. Needless to say it was binned.

## 16 PUSH-PUSH SWITCHES

Push-pull switches – a switch box combined with a potentiometer in a single unit – have been around for a long time. The control knob works conventionally but it can be pulled up or pushed down to use the switch mechanism. The switch can perform any number of functions, some of which are detailed in this article. The problem for Strat players is that stock tapered knobs are not easy to grip and you can't get your fingertips underneath if they are tight against the scratchplate. The solution is simple – fit a push-push switch instead, so you push down to switch on, and push down again to switch off. It's fast, effective and means you don't need to drill holes in your pickguard.

This push/push switch is mounted on a pot casing. The standard value for Strats is 250K.

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## 17 SADDLES

Most of the changes that were instigated at Fender by the CBS management were intended to reduce costs rather than make real improvements. Like many other components, the quality of string saddles fell when a cheap alloy nicknamed 'monkey metal' replaced the bent steel. For vintage tone, steel saddles may provide a noticeable improvement; other popular choices include stainless steel, bass and titanium. Heavy trem users may wish to investigate roller saddles, or Graphtecs. They all have different tone and sustain characteristics, so do your research and make sure the saddles you choose are compatible with your Strat's string spacing.

**There are countless options for upgrading Strat saddles. These Graphtecs have built-in piezo pickups that are intended to provide Stratocasters with an 'acoustic' option. Pete Townshend is known for using these.**

## 18 ADDING A SHIELDING PLATE

This is something we discovered by accident while trying to replicate the huge, warm tones of a genuine '63 Strat with an '83 Tokai Goldstar. Acoustically there was little to choose between them, but despite trying various sets of pickups and correcting the tone cap, the sound wasn't quite there. By chance we had an aluminium shielding plate hanging around – just like the ones Fender used between 1959 and 1967. On a whim we fitted the shielding plate and the midrange acquired a thicker, chewier and sweeter vintage loveliness. We can't offer a scientific explanation but if you're chasing SRV tone, a £10 aluminium shielding plate should be the first item on your shopping list.

**A 1960s-style aluminium shielding plate does influence the sound of a Stratocaster. Try one before buying an expensive set of handwound pickups.**

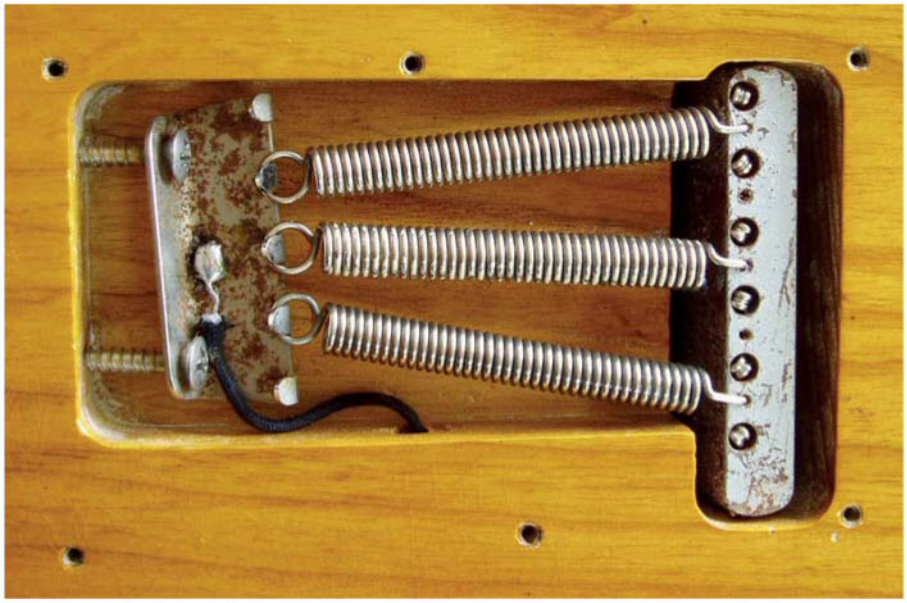
## 19 SHIM THE TREE

This may help your Strat to stay in tune a little better. In lieu of an angled headstock, Fender use string trees to achieve the necessary break angle over the nut. We have noticed plenty of Strats with string trees screwed flat to the front of the headstock, making the break angle greater than it needs to be and increasing friction under the tree itself. Put a spacer under the string tree to reduce the angle and straighten the string path between the nut and the tuners – that's what Fender always did. Alternatively you can bypass the string tree completely and achieve the necessary break angle by winding the B and E strings all the way down to the bottom of the tuner post.

**The string tree on the left is shimmed, while the one on the right is flat to the board. We'd recommend shimming both in order to reduce friction and avoid tuning issues.**

## 20 SPRING COVER REMOVAL

This one is a source of contention because some claim to hear the effect of a removed spring cover while others can't hear any change at all... and even the advocates admit it only works on some Strats. Either way, it's free and totally reversible. Simply unscrew the six screws holding the spring cover onto the back of the body and remove it. If your guitar sounds more resonant and responsive, then congratulations on completing a successful upgrade. You'll probably find string changing a lot easier too. If your guitar sounds just the same, feel free to put the cover back on.



**Some claim to hear a difference when they remove the spring cover; others don't. It's worth a try.**

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## 21 STEEL TREM BLOCKS

Fender originally used 10oz cold rolled steel (CRS-1018) blocks with shallow holes for the ball ends, and these are generally regarded as being effective tone enhancers. Use a magnet to test if your block is steel – if the magnet falls off, it isn't. Callaham's vintage-spec blocks are excellent but expensive in the UK. Domestic equivalents are available from Wudtone, and Kevin Hurley sells his blocks on eBay, both relic'd and non-relic'd and in narrow and wide spacing. With either of these, you should get extra brightness, definition and sustain. Even if you don't plan to change your block, it's worth popping off the bridge plate to scrape off any paint that may be applied to the top.

**This cold rolled steel Hurley relic trem block weighs a vintage-correct 10oz. It was made in the UK, and at a shade under £30 it's less than half the price of some American made blocks.**

## 22 STRING OUTER-SPACING

Many players experience a problem with their E strings slipping off the fingerboard when they apply finger vibrato. On old guitars this can occur because the neck has become worn through years of playing or overly aggressive fretwork, but some contemporary Strats – like the Yngwie Malmsteen signature model – exhibit the very same problem. The Callaham V/N bridge is useful in combatting this as it combines a vintage-spec 2 7/32" screw spacing with modern 2 1/16" string spacing. It's a drop-in replacement for vintage-spec Strats, and it cures slippage by moving the E strings further towards the centre of the fingerboard. Bent steel saddles and a cold rolled steel block come as part of the package, and the narrower spacing might also be a better match for Strats with humbuckers.

**Callaham make very high-end hardware and this Vintage/Narrow bridge has modern string spacing with vintage-style pivot screw spacing to prevent E strings from slipping off the fingerboard.**

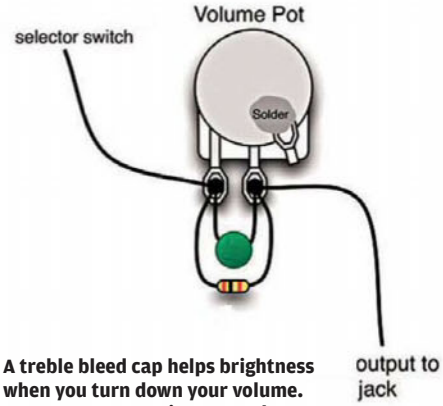
## 23 TIGHTENING THE NECK JOINT

If a guitar's neck is loose in its pocket, then it will be less effective at transferring vibrations. On top of that, the neck may actually move around, causing tuning instability and string slippage. On occasion you can see a gap between the bottom of the neck and the neck pocket, even when the screws are fully tightened. Assuming there's no shim, this could be because the screw holes in the body are too narrow for the screws. If you can't push the plate screws straight through the body holes, you should have them drilled out to increase their diameter. Many builders experience this issue with replacement bodies.

**If your Strat's neck screws appear to be fully tightened but there's still a gap visible between the body and the neck, it requires some attention. Assuming there's no shim, there should be no gap whatsoever.**

## 24 TREBLE BLEED

Does your tone get dull when you turn down? If so, try soldering a capacitor between the input and output terminals of the volume pot. When the volume control is fully up, the cap is bypassed, but when you turn down, the cap allows some of the high frequency content to bypass the volume pot and go straight through to the output. Suitable capacitor types include ceramic disc, film and silver mica. Be careful, as if the capacitor value is too high, you may experience some excessive brightness as you back off. Some suggest a 130K resistor in series with the cap to reduce the treble bleed or a 100K resistor in parallel with the cap to modify the pot taper. Begin with a 1000pF, and be prepared to experiment.




**A treble bleed cap helps brightness when you turn down your volume. Some use a cap on its own; others prefer a resistor in series or – as shown here – in parallel with the cap.**

## 25 TUNE YOUR TREM

Leo Fender and his team intended the Strat vibrato to be a floating unit, where the spring tension balances out the pull from the strings. There are no hard and fast rules about setting these up, because all players require different feels. Some require no upward movement, but most prefer to be able to vibrato above and below pitch. Tightening and loosening the claw screws fine-tunes the trem response, and it can be done with surprising precision. Carl Verhayen tunes his trems so the G, B and E strings pull up a minor third, a tone and a semitone respectively. It sounds very musical and it's surprisingly easy to set up.

**This spring claw is intentionally angled because it has been adjusted to provide precise intervals when the bar is pulled up.**

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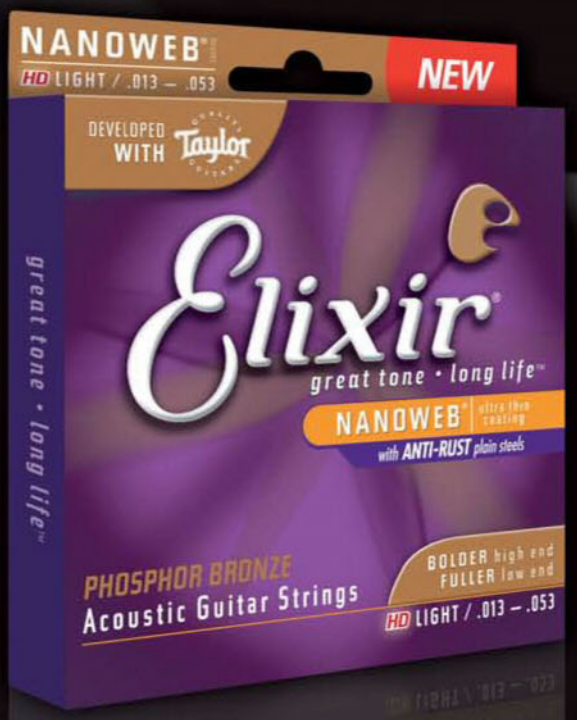


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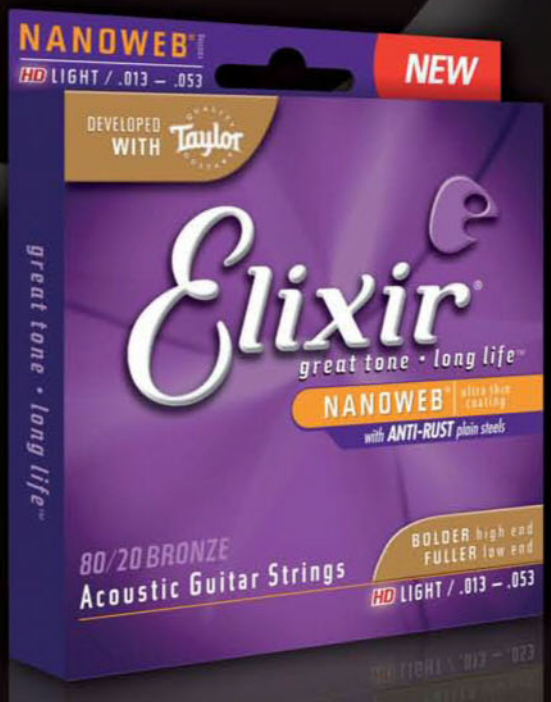


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# Face Value

From fashionable mod lad to rural troubadour, from bass player to guitarist to songwriter and so much more – **Michael Heatley** remembers the beloved Ronnie Lane

He may once have said 'when I was a kid, I just wanted to be a star', but Ronnie Lane's career path was the opposite of today's reality TV-inspired race for fame. A mid-'60s pop idol with the Small Faces, he gathered credibility as bassist with the Rod Stewart-fronted Faces; then, as Rod became the focus, Lane slipped away to focus on folk and country, using a cross between a touring band and a circus under canvas as his vehicle.

Lane passed away in 1997 aged just 51, but his memory lives on. Today, his roots-rock legacy is being nurtured by a reformed Slim Chance, a group of musicians who worked with him at various times over the years, and he's remembered with more than affection not only by those who followed his early years but also by a string of later-generation musicians who consider Ronnie Lane's songs to be the epitome of heart, honesty and humour.

After leaving the Faces Ronnie Lane switched from bass to guitar, but not before he left a legacy of influential cuts that benefited from his low-end input. His nickname was Plonk – but, as Small Faces/Faces drummer Kenney Jones explains, it was something of a misnomer: 'We never told each other what to play, it just locked in. Ronnie was a melodic bass player – he wasn't a plunk-plonker at all.'

Lane, born on All Fool's Day 1946, played guitar in his first band, the Outcasts, but became attracted to bass while working at amp makers Selmer in Holborn, playing along to Booker T & The MGs songs in his breaks. 'In the East End of London it seemed nobody wanted to play the bass unless he was a real loser who couldn't play a lead instrument,' he told Alan Vorda in 1987. 'They thought they ➧➧

## Gear

**Guitars**

**With the Small Faces:**
**Harmony H22 bass**

**With the Faces:**
**Custom-built Zemaitis basses**

**With Slim Chance and Passing Show:**
**Zemaitis, Fender and Ovation guitars, Zemaitis resonator**

**Amp**

**Ampeg Portaflex B-15 (Faces)**

## A PAIR OF RIPE ZEMAITIS

**Ronnie Lane's most famous bass is the black twin-pickup custom Zemaitis model he used in the Faces years and which he's seen playing on many BBC TV clips from the early '70s. It is now owned by the former Ozzy Osbourne/Rainbow bassist, Bob Daisley.**

**Tony Zemaitis (1935-2002) built his handmade guitars in Kent from 1965 to 2000. A cabinet maker of Lithuanian heritage, he came up with the idea of using metal to decorate instruments after shielding Stratocaster pickups with metal to avoid electrical hum. The next step was the creation of a series of (mostly) metal-fronted electric guitars, each totally original, which by the early '70s were to be seen in the hands of many leading rockers like Tony McPhee (Groundhogs), Ron Wood and, of course, Lane. Ronnie's basses were less elaborate; he's been pictured with another Zemaitis bass with slanted pickups and also owned an acoustic flat-top example, along with a 12-string.**

**Ronnie's other legendary Zemaitis was the six-string resonator guitar he played with Slim Chance, created after he removed its dish from his Gretsch Sho-Bro and put a crude wooden panel over the resulting gap. A favourite of Lane's, with his name engraved on the truss-rod cover, the Gretsch/Zemaitis used to hang behind the bathroom door at Fishpool Farm. When current owner Keith Smart acquired it, it had a crack in the bottom from where it once fell off the hook. This has been now restored, and a YouTube clip gives interested viewers a demo of the instrument.**

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Ronnie and Slim Chance playing a festival at London's Olympia in 1976

Photo: Redferns / Getty Images

could play the bass 'cos it only had four strings. That was the attitude toward the bass.'

All that changed on meeting music shop employee Steve Marriott in the J60 Music Bar in 1965. Marriott not only sold Lane the Harmony H22 he would use for most of the decade, but also formed a band with him – the Small Faces. Both were mods, the style-conscious youth cult that also spawned the Who, and that was where they picked up their early following. A friend of Marriott's remarked that they all had 'small faces' – 'face' also being a mod term for a trend-setter. Their music was heavily influenced by the US R&B sounds the mods loved, and Marriott's collection of import records proved invaluable.

*'Ronnie used to joke that he got Slim Chance out of Exchange & Mart'*

Ronnie took inspiration from Motown bassist James Jamerson, as can clearly be heard on *Get Yourself Together* from 1967's *Small Faces* album. *Talk To You* from the same record shows his willingness to leave gaps, making each note tell, while *I'm Only Dreaming*, the B-side of *Itchycoo Park*, was an example of his adding dynamics to the chorus after a laid-back verse. His semi-acoustic Harmony H22, with a black pickguard, can be seen in videos for singles *Song Of A Baker* and *Itchycoo Park*, while a two-pickup H27 makes an appearance playing second hit single *Sha La La La Lee* on German TV's *Beat Beat Beat* show.

Ronnie habitually used a pick rather than fingers, as did most of his ex-guitarist contemporaries. He combined well with Kenney Jones' backbeat drums and the Hammond organ of Ian McLagan, the rhythm section that would also power the Faces after singer-guitarist Marriott's decision in spring 1969 to link with the Herd's Peter Frampton in supergroup Humble Pie.

The remaining trio recruited guitarist Ron Wood and, eventually, vocalist Rod Stewart as replacements, dropping the 'Small' prefix as they did so. They covered McCartney's *Maybe I'm Amazed* effectively early on, Lane perhaps sensing a kindred spirit, while *Stay With Me*, the breakthrough single of late '71, showed his ability to groove in the verse while sneaking in sly runs to introduce the chorus. Songwriting-wise Lane more than contributed to the Faces, even if he had to fight against the prolific Stewart/Wood duo that had produced *Stay With Me*. Songs like the first album's *Stone* and *Ooh La La*, the latter co-written with Wood, all added to his canon.

But there was a perception that Faces LPs were becoming a repository for songs that didn't make it to Rod Stewart's solo releases. While unhappy with this, Lane admitted Rod's records turned out better than the band's. 'He does an album in a week,' he lamented to *Rolling Stone*. 'He just goes in and crash, bang, wallop – it's finished. When we do it, there are five opinions to take into account.' (The Faces played on both Rod's solo and their own band efforts, though Stewart's *Maggie May* saw Ron Wood, not Lane, wield the bass.)

A parting of the ways was inevitable, provoked when unwise off-the-record remarks from Stewart made their way into print. It also coincided with Lane abruptly ending his marriage and running off with soon-to-be second wife Kate. His new band, Slim Chance, was a major life change too; they were no Faces, and were clearly named with tongue in cheek. The first line-up featured Scots duo Gallagher and Lyle, but they soon ➔

## SLIM CHANCE TODAY

**Slim Chance was relaunched in 2010 by five musicians who had all played with Lane at various times in the '70s. Bassist Steve Bingham had been in the original Passing Show, while Charlie Hart featured on many albums including *See Me*, playing keyboards, violin and accordion. Alun Davies, best known as Cat Stevens' guitar player, lived in the neighbouring village and was a regular visitor to Fishpool Farm, while Steve Simpson and drummer Colin Davey complete the line-up. 'Ronnie used to joke in the early days that he got this band out of *Exchange & Mart*,' says Simpson, 'which your young readers won't know anything about!'**

**Davey has recently been replaced by John Lingwood, while another honorary member is keyboardist Geraint Watkins. 'He got the call in the early days,' Simpson says, 'but he was busy – probably with Dave Edmunds.**

**'Having created an album of Ronnie's songs' – *The Show Goes On*, available from their website – 'there's still a lot more we'd all like to cover, but it's important for us now to put our own stamp on things,' Steve continues. 'We have this sound; this is what we do, and creating our own stuff is our current project. We'll probably dig out a few more of Ronnie's tunes, too!'**

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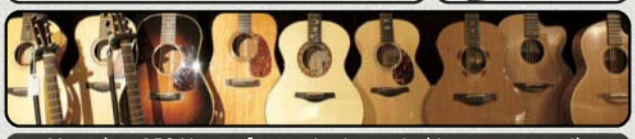
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Back to the country: Ronnie Lane with his band on the farm

Photo: ??????????????????

## Listen up

SMALL FACES
**Ogden's Nut Gone Flake**
(1968)
**The mod *Sgt. Pepper*, perhaps, a true masterpiece by any yardstick and steeped in Ronnie Lane through and through**

FACES
**A Nod's As Good As A Wink**
(1971)
**The band's second-to-last album with Ronnie in the ranks contains *Debris* and *You're So Rude*, two Lane-penned classics**

RONNIE LANE AND SLIM CHANCE
**Ooh La La: An Island Harvest**
(2014)
**A compilation of out-takes, rarities and BBC sessions. Not perfect, but still a worthwhile purchase with so much material out of print**

## And another thing...

**Lane's good pal Eric Clapton composed his iconic *Wonderful Tonight* while sitting round the fire at Fishpool Farm**

departed. First single *How Come* was launched at a party in Gerry Cottle's Big Top on Clapham Common, in November 1973. This sowed the seed for a tour Ronnie would undertake the following year – the legendary but ill-fated Passing Show.

According to guitarist/violinist Steve Simpson, the Passing Show was an ironically expensive reaction to the Faces' champagne lifestyle. 'My feeling is that Ronnie wanted something a bit more real. He wanted his feet on the ground; he'd had enough of jetsetting. But it absolutely stripped him of money. Everybody in sight took him for a ride, from the hire of the tent and vehicles... everybody was sucking on him like leeches, selling him generator trucks that were only destined to last a couple of months.' The venture was a commerical failure, but has it passed into rock'n'roll history.

> *'Ronnie wanted something a bit more real. He'd had enough of jetsetting'*

The LP *Anymore For Anymore,* released in '74, was an eclectic mix of Tin Pan Alley, folk, rock'n'roll and Americana. By 1976's and *One For The Road,* writer John Pidgeon concluded that Ronnie had 'created something unique in British music: a genuine form of native country music – no capitals, no inverted commas, just music that came out of the country and couldn't conceivably be created anywhere else.' But Lane wasn't so much renouncing rock as simply returning to his roots. 'It was the stuff my dad used to listen to: Fats Domino, Fats Waller and so on.'

The band he used for *One For The Road* and its predecessor, *Ronnie Lane's Slim Chance,* included Simpson, Ruann O'Lochlainn, Charlie Hart and Bruce Rowlands. Lane had switched to guitar, leading his band from the front and leaving bass duties to Brian Belshaw. 'He'd still play bass, but not on stage,' Simpson explains. 'Brian, who'd come out of Blossom Toes and BB Blunder, was such a good player, Ronnie would only have to show him the way he would approach a song once. All he needed was a nudge.'

Lane's set-up at Fishpool Farm in Hyssington, just over the border in Wales, has been described as 'like a Welsh Big Pink, only with sheep farmers living down the lane rather than Bob Dylan'. Apart from the occasional Faces songwriting royalty, Lane only had LMS, his mobile studio, a converted Airstream caravan that had cost a huge £60,000 but was in great demand, being used to record Eric Clapton's Rainbow Concert in early 1973, and by the Who for *Quadrophenia.* Along with renting out pasture to other farmers, it ended up subsidising his musical visions.

In an attempt to balance the books Lane took part in an ill-fated Small Faces reunion but quickly exited, commenting: 'It's all right to visit your old school, but you don't want to attend classes'. An album with Pete Townshend, *Rough Mix,* was more successful, and kickstarted the Who guitarist's solo career – but, as Townshend later related, Ronnie wasn't well. 'He could sing okay, but he couldn't play the bass. I got angry with him halfway through the session... I punched his right shoulder to emphasise a point, and he went flying down the hall. It was then that I realised he was sick.' By the time of the *See Me* album in 1979, recorded with friend Eric Clapton, Ronnie Lane had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. He moved to Texas where the climate was more beneficial, but found music-making increasingly difficult and died in the States in 1997.

Countless bands, from the Quireboys to the Black Crowes to the Levellers and the Pogues, have a debt to Ronnie Lane and the music he created later in his career. 'He wrote quirky songs and great rockers,' says Steve Simpson. 'But he was a performer, too – I've met nobody who can sing like he did, that particular register, the wonderful clarity of his high voice.' Many would love to be remembered equally for their vocal, instrumental and songwriting skills, but the multi-faceted Ronnie Lane has achieved it, and more.

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# Magic Boxes

From the West Country via Zimbabwe to a club or festival near you, Babajack are reinventing the blues with an elemental sound and a rainbow of homemade instruments. Interview by **Steve Bailey**

Photos: Mike Prior

## Gear

**Guitars**
Two self-built six-string 'wine box' guitars, one with a Shed humbucker and the other with an Epiphone humbucker. Hound Dog Dobro (kept in open G), Stonebridge OMS 34 Series acoustic (kept in open C) and a Bellville archtop (kept in standard)

**Amp**
Custom made 12W Fender tweed-type with original '60s valves and a Tayden Retro 55 speaker

**Effects**
None

**Other**
Antony Dannecker harmonicas and D'Addario strings

With their stripped-back, slide-driven blues-folk, Babajack stand out from the British blues hordes. Add mesmerising tribal rhythms, hypnotic riffs, impassioned vocals, a raw, rootsy attack and the band's uncommon DIY instrument credo, and you have one of the most inventive and intriguing combos around. It also works on record, as demonstrated on their fourth and latest long-player, *Running Man*.

Evolving from the hard-gigging duo of Becky Tate and Trevor Steger, Babajack have recently adopted drummer Tosh Morase and bassist Adam Bertenshaw and have won increasingly coveted festival slots and an ever-expanding audience. The core of the sound comes from vocalist Tate's cajón – the name is simply Spanish for 'box', but in her hands the percussive effect is a marvel – and guitar/harmonica man Trevor Steger's slide and fingerstyle work, all coaxed from his mojo-infused 'wine-box' guitars.

Trevor has earned a crust as an in-demand artisan woodworker for most of his working life, specialising in crafting bespoke furniture and creating fine wooden interiors, but only recently has he put his considerable talents to test on instrument making. Music has always been a passion; he played bass in punk and rock bands from his school days, but slowly found himself gravitating towards blues of a sparser nature. By the time he and his former partner made the bold decision to travel to Africa with the VOS (Voluntary Services Overseas) in 1989, he was slowly becoming set on reinventing himself as a harp-playing blues guitar man.

'I taught woodwork in the bush in Zimbabwe with the Shona people for three and a half years,' Steger explains in his engaging West Country burr. 'We were living in an African village. There were no roads, no electricity, no plumbing. The people there made these strange guitars out of boxes and old saucepans. You'd see them herding the goats and tinkling these fishing-line guitars. I got one of the kids to make me one, and it was fantastic. They look like prehistoric instruments made out of goatskin and a pot, with bits of twig for the tuning pegs. That was the initial thing that got me thinking about building my own guitar.'

Trevor's first son Jack was born in Africa, and this happy event also provided his future band's name. 'In Shona culture you take your son's name, so I was known as Babajack. He's now 21, he's an engineer and he's playing in a rap band with loop pedals and stuff.'

It was in around 2001, some years after his return from Zimbabwe, that Steger found himself a single man and finally pursuing his bluesman ambition playing in a duo in and around Tewkesbury in the west country.

'My friend who I was playing with at the time said he knew someone good with the djembe drum. It was Becky, who came along for a jam. We did a few gigs, and then my friend, who was singing, suddenly left. We still had all these gigs, so it was like "what are we going to do?" We cobbled a vocal together between us, and that's when we began to call ourselves Babajack – and over time Becky has become an excellent singer.'

The pair bonded to such a degree that it was necessary to put the band on the back-burner for a number of years when their son Johnny was born. It was around 2009 that they decided to reboot Babajack in a more dedicated manner, and Steger found the workbench time to create the instrument that would define his sound. ➔

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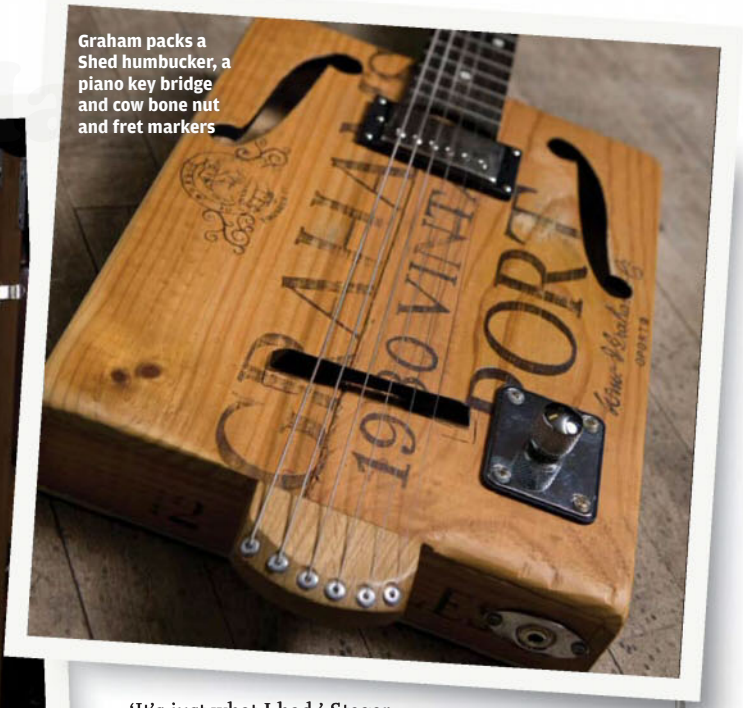
Wine box guitars nestled in their bespoke flightcase: Graham on the left, Joanna on the right


Graham packs a Shed humbucker, a piano key bridge and cow bone nut and fret markers

'It's just what I had,' Steger laughs. 'I don't know if guitar necks are ever made from oak! It's quite a heavy wood and I also put in a stainless steel bar as a non-adjustable trussrod, and I bought some slabs of ebony for the fingerboard. I've made the necks wide, like a classical guitar, and they're flat with no profile. You can buy the ebony on eBay. I just put it through the planer. If you know the measurement between the nut and the bridge, you can look online to see where to cut the frets. One has 14 frets to the body with 17 in total, and the other has 19. I'm just amazed that they play, that they stay in tune and that the intonation is right.'

The first six-string winebox is known as 'Graham' as it once contained Graham's Port. 'I was in my father's house after he died and his wife had been using it as a sewing box. I thought, I'll have that. I use cow bone for the fret markers and the nuts. I don't go for tone controls, just a volume, and it has a lovely Shed pickup.'

*'I'm amazed that they play, that they stay in tune and that the intonation is right'*

'Making musical instruments and other bits and pieces has just come out of necessity, really,' Steger confesses. 'Becky bought me a book on classical guitar making, and was I looking at plans for Weissenborn slide guitars. I thought, I've got to pay a mortgage so I can't spend weeks in a workshop making one of those, and it's going to take a few attempts to get good at it. Then I saw a poster for the cigarbox-making thing.'

Steger actually bought himself a cigarbox guitar to test the waters, but found the size was an issue. 'It was tiny! It was like playing a little banjo. I thought, I want a man's guitar! We had a wine box around the house so I thought, yeah, I'll cut it down a bit and then I'll use that. It was just another spin on it, really. I started with a four-string which I called 'The Beast'. I used to use it quite a lot, and still get it out now and again.' (Catch Babajack's *Money's All Gone* video on youtube to see Trevor playing it.)

From then, it seemed natural to progress to six strings. The extra wood needed was sourced from workshop leftovers, and both the necks of his current wine box six-strings are made from quartersawn oak.

The other one is named 'Joanna' as a nod to Steger's use of piano keys for bridges. As on Graham the bridge is carved from a black ebony piano key, but Joanna's has a strip of stainless steel inlaid on top for a harder sound and more sustain.

'My son Jack did the headstock marquetry for me on this one, so he got involved. The humbucker is a Gibson Epiphone. The tuners I just got off eBay – I can't remember what they are, but they're good quality ones – and a local landlord had a few wine boxes that he didn't want, so this one came from the pub. Both guitars sound really growly. Basically I go for just a raw, straight sound.' Graham is tuned to D minor and Joanna is in Trevor's own cigarbox-style open D – from low to high, that's DADAAD – and both setups are perfect for Steger's aggressive slide work.

Open up Trevor's smart wooden gig case and in amongst the array of his favoured Dannecker harmonicas you'll see a selection of homemade slides. 'I like quite a short 45mm slide but I also wanted one with a curve on the top so I can tilt it up and pick behind it, almost like a lap steel,' he explains. 'My son Jack made the one I use most from brass. I just gave him the dimensions.' Other homemade slides ↦

Box of tricks: Dannecker harmonicas, homemade slides and other useful bits and bobs



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## Listen up

BABAJACK
**Running Man**
(2013)
**Growling wine box guitar really comes to the fore on the latest record, while the barebones Babajack ethic rides high on gutsy swagger and growing confidence**

BABAJACK
**Rooster**
(2012)
**The previous album is of a gentler bent, at times incorporating double bass and violin. It may not be as incendiary but it smoulders with melancholy promise**

include a slice of copper piping as used by Son House and another made out of polished cow bone. 'That one looks a bit like a fig roll! It gets a really mellow sound. I also made some bottleneck slides out of a wine bottle. I just sanded them off so they don't shred my fingers.'

Naturally, Steger made the travel cases for his guitars and also built the case and cabinet for his amplifier. Even the amp is built from scratch... but by a friend. 'I didn't know him at the time, but he saw me play and just came up and said "I want to build you an amp". He's an airline pilot and also the brother-in-law of the Shed Pickups guy.

'It took him three months to make, working on and off. He based it on a Fender tweed. He did all the circuits, everything. He also made himself one at the same time, so I paid for all the parts and made him a cabinet in exchange. We've put an English Tayden speaker in, the Retro 55, and all of the valves are old 1960s ones. It's a beautiful-sounding amp, no fuss, no fiddly bits, no reverb, nothing. It's only supposed to be 12W but I've never had it above 3 or 4 on the volume because it's properly loud. His next project is building an amp for my harp. He's bought an old 1940s Bakelite radio and he's going to build an amp in there with the lights that come on and all that. It's going to be very cool.'

Also integral to the Babajack sound is Becky's cajón. For the uninitiated, a cajón is a percussion instrument that the player generally sits on while beating out rhythms – but Steger's version is more finely-honed than most.

'I made it out of birch ply, then it's got oak and walnut inlay, and inside we put the wire from a snare drum to give it a bit of sizzle. What I do is to sand "sweet spots" in it. You sand it from the back to the front, and keep playing it until you get different tones in different areas. You can enhance the bass notes, or whatever you want. You can almost get a small drum kit in one little box.

'I've made cajóns for people and I do get a lot of enquiries about the guitars, but when I say to people "It'd be around £500", they go "Oh", you know. But each one would be unique, and that's just covering the time it takes to build one. We've always lived hand-to-mouth because I've always been busy with bespoke woodwork. It's hard to say to myself I'm going to stop working and make something that I might not need or be able to sell, but it's certainly something I'd like to pursue if people are interested.'

The nucleus of the Babajack sound is Trevor's guitar and harmonica and Becky's vocals and percussion

*"We play a festival one week, local pubs the next. You can't be up your backside about it"*

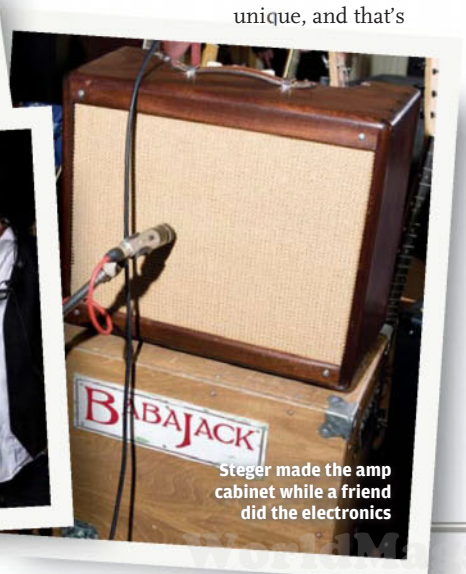
The way things are going for Babajack of late, Trevor may struggle to find the time for such worthy endeavours. 'When we started up again around five years ago we did every open mic we could. We'd almost do open mic tours. Then you get the pub gigs. A lot of festivals don't like duos on the main stage so we thought, well, let's get a band in. Now we have festival dates lined up all summer, so it's certainly worked. People are paying us to fly to Germany, France, Switzerland and Poland. You think, bloody hell, how did this all happen? Once you've been to all the corners you realise that the blues scene in England isn't that big, and that's why we're trying to cultivate Europe as well. We can play a festival one week to huge crowds of people, and be in the local pub the next. You can't be too up your own backside about it, because you have to make a living.'

Life may have taken some unexpected detours, but Steger is very happy where he's wound up. 'When I left school I wanted to be a woodcraft person, and I achieved that. Then I thought, I'll go to Zimbabwe, sit in the African bush for several years with my guitar, keep learning and then I'll come back and form a blues band. Actually it's taken a bit longer than I expected, but the life plan is coming to fruition!'

Trevor is an ingenious fellow, though, and there are always a few new ideas floating around his consciousness. 'Becs is now learning the cello. It's funny because I was working in the green room for the Rolling Stones for their Glastonbury show last year in one of those Airstream caravans, and their lighting manager gave me a magnum of champagne in a very long wine box as a thank-you. I was stood in the kitchen looking at the box yesterday, thinking "I wonder if I could make a wine box cello out of that?" That would be interesting, wouldn't it...'

Another secret weapon, Trev's custom slide

The full Babajack band with drummer Tosh Morase and bassist Adam Bertenshaw



Steger made the amp cabinet while a friend did the electronics

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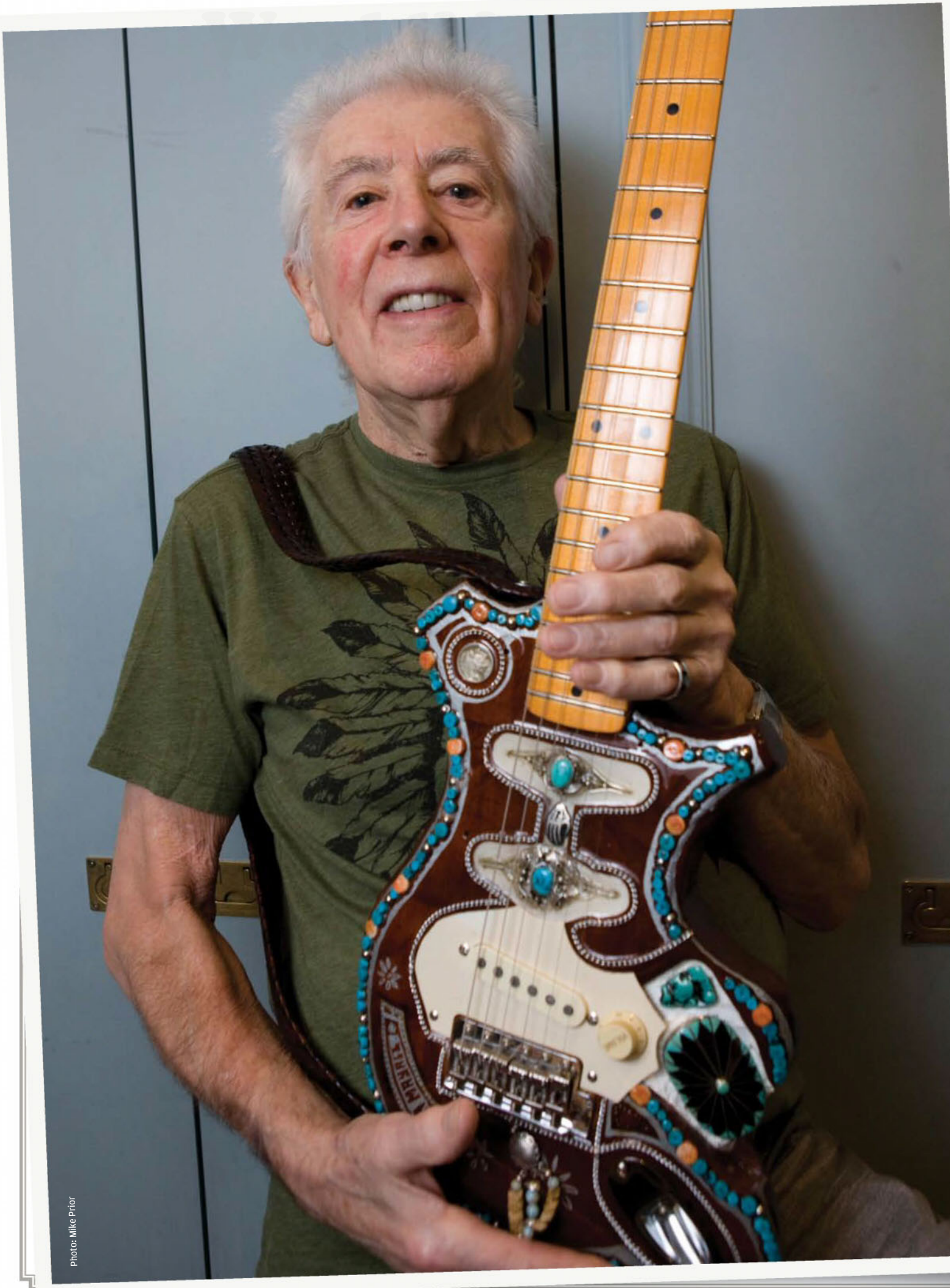

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# BLUES Genes

After half a century of leading the blues, John Mayall still can't get enough of the road. **Julian Piper** meets the tireless bandleader to discuss the travelling life, great guitar players, and chopping up Stratocasters

'We'll just get on and do what we do...' With this briefest of introductions, his long white ponytail hanging over his bony shoulders, and looking for all the world like some crazed backwoods preacher about to instil the need for redemption in his congregation, the Godfather of English blues bounces onto the cramped stage of Ronnie Scott's. It's the last show of a gruelling 60-date European tour, and this small London club appearance must certainly be awaking a few ghosts. It was not so far away in Wardour Street, half a century before, that he played sweaty all-nighters with the Bluesbreakers in clubs like the Marquee and Flamingo – gigs that set the gold standard for British blues.

Ironically, Mayall's approach to playing the blues – raw and anarchic – made the bands of Alexis Korner, who had been instrumental in persuading Mayall to leave his Manchester treehouse and hit the London scene, seem almost tame in comparison. Rather than celebrating the Chicago blues of the earlier Delta emigrés like Muddy Waters, the burgeoning guitar-slingers in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers – Eric Clapton, Peter Green and Mick Taylor – steered the set lists towards the tougher and rockier sounds of younger West Side Chicago players like Otis Rush, Buddy Guy and Freddie King.

Forty years on, it's difficult to assess just what kind of shape the blues is in. Things maybe aren't as bad as Dan Ackroyd forecast in the 1980 movie *The Blues Brothers*, when he joked 'One day the blues will be a small part of the classical LP section in your local library', but the music is hardly mainstream.

As such, John Mayall's longevity is pretty phenomenal; a graph of the highs and lows in his career would look like a cross section of the Alps. Echoing the title of his album with Peter Green, life for him has at times been a hard road. After relocating to Los Angeles in 1969 and the hippie enclave that was Laurel Canyon, home to Frank Zappa, Jim Morrison and many other music icons, John suffered the devastating blow of his house burning down, taking with it not only all his musical instruments but also his irreplaceable archive of diaries and live recordings from the early days of the British blues scene.

Then – despite the success of his acoustic album *The Turning Point*, which attained gold status – the popularity of prog rock and then punk during the '70s pushed him into a musical and personal decline. It wasn't until the early '80s – aided by the incendiary guitar playing of Coco Montoya and Walter Trout – that he relaunched his career.

*'I was going to take a break, disband the Bluesbreakers. Then the phone rang'*

Three decades later the John Mayall bandwagon shows no sign of slowing down... all the more amazing when you consider that just before Xmas, John celebrated his eightieth birthday. And unlike some of his veteran blues peers, a John Mayall show is just that. Diving between his keyboard and guitar, playing harmonica and singing, his energy is astounding.

Now his new album *A Special Life*, recorded with his road band of Texan Rocky Athos on guitar, Greg Rzab on bass and drummer Jay Davenport, is arguably the best thing he's brought out for some years. Providing a solid platform for Athos's powerful guitar work, the usual mix of Mayall originals and carefully-chosen reworkings of a few blues standards like Eddie ➔

**Gear**

**John Mayall**
Customised Eric Johnson Fender Stratocaster, Roland JC-120 amplifier

**Rocky Athos**
Gibson Les Paul, Fender Stratocaster, Fender Twin Reverb

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Taylor's *Big Town Playboy* and Jimmy Rogers' *That's Alright* crackle with fire.

Right now John Mayall is having some well-deserved down time, but it won't last. The autumn will see him embark on yet another mammoth trek around the British Isles, and he laughs when we suggest that maybe he takes time out to do walking or birdwatching.

'No – nothing rural! I just enjoy being out in the sunshine and catching up with family and friends. I really enjoyed the Ronnie Scott's gig; it was a kind of celebratory night at the end of our European tour, but it was strange to be playing in such a small place.'

> *'You're on the road 24 hours a day, so social compatibility is of prime importance'*

In 2008, Mayall officially 'retired' the Bluesbreakers. Guitarist Buddy Whittington, who'd been with him since 1993, unexpectedly found himself with a solo career, and for a brief few months it did indeed look as we'd seen the last of the blues septuagenarian.

'I felt I'd done everything I could with the Bluesbreakers,' Mayall explains. 'We hadn't really progressed. We had done so much work that I felt I could take a break, disband the Bluesbreakers as a name and take a vacation from it all. The way it turned out was that within weeks of it shutting down, Eagle Records got on the phone clamouring for a new album, which is what kickstarted the band I have now. We've been together for six years and from that moment haven't looked back. I met Rocky Athos through Buddy [Whittington], and I felt he was a very fine and unusual player. Luckily he agreed to join, and it's been great from there on.'

So how does Mayall go about putting together a new band... and has he ever auditioned people?

'No, never,' he admits. 'Things just always seem to fall in place. When I wanted my new rhythm section, Greg Rzab in Chicago was my bass player and I asked him to choose a drummer; bass and drums have to really lock in together, and it was his suggestion that I hire Jay Davenport. By hiring Greg I hired two people, and for me they're the perfect rhythm section.'

Mayall has had an impressively large number of players pass through his band. It raises the question, does he look for musicality first, or rather consider whether everyone will get on well together?

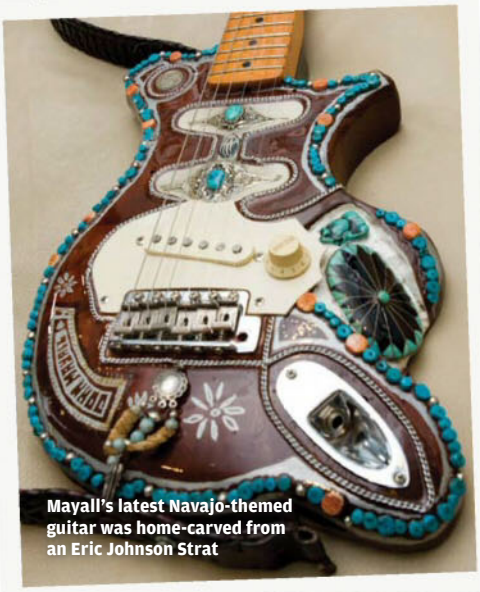
'Well, you take it for granted that the people in your band can play, otherwise you wouldn't have approached them,' he muses. 'Social compatibility is the most important thing. You're on the road 24 hours a day but only onstage for a couple of hours, so how you get on is of prime importance. Of course there've been plenty of hard times, but in general most of the musicians that I've worked with have appreciated the work I've put into running the band – certainly the ones that I've worked with over the last two decades.'

Mayall's always had a formidable reputation as a hard bandleader; at heart he's always been a 'road dog', hates having a night off and, as Buddy Whittington once said, would rather play anywhere rather than twiddle his thumbs. 'We had four nights off on the recent European tour – travel time – and it really felt most odd,' he agrees.

And what about one particular myth – that in the '60s he allegedly slept comfortably in a bunk at the back of the band van while the others huddled in stony silence around the engine to keep warm?

'I never figured out how any of that ever came about; maybe it was something put about by someone who couldn't get in the band!' he retaliates. 'We only had a small Thames van that I'd inherited from Georgie Fame. For the treks up the motorway I'd fitted four bunks, so there was one for everybody, not just me. After a while it became obvious that the band weren't going for it, so I took one bunk out so that they could sit sideways on the bottom one. But because the van had no windows, everyone still went to the front seat.'

John Mayall albums have always featured cover versions, often unexpected ones, and *A Special Life* is no exception. Does he have a list of songs he works ➔



Mayall's latest Navajo-themed guitar was home-carved from an Eric Johnson Strat

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## Listen up

**JOHN MAYALL**
**A Special Life** (2014)
**Out now on Forty Below Records, the band tear through a clutch of Mayall originals and breathe new fire into some Chicago classics with Rocky Athos's hard nosed Texas guitar**

**JOHN MAYALL WITH ERIC CLAPTON**
**Bluesbreakers** (1966)
**Clapton's overdriven '59 Les Paul coaxed tones to die for out of a Marshall combo and revitalised the way we all expected blues to be played**

**JOHN MAYALL'S BLUESBREAKERS**
**A Hard Road** (1967)
**With Peter Green, the Bluesbreakers proved they were still the hottest blues band in the land. Green's instrumental *The Supernatural* is one of the most inspired pieces of Les Paul feedback of all time**

through when recording a new album? 'Not really... but there are always ideas in my head, and it doesn't take long to round them up,' he considers. 'When you get the chance to make an album you first have to think about what might work and the best mix of different styles.

'But I've always tried to interpret songs in my own way whatever the source material is. The Jimmy Rogers version of *That's Alright* was originally a slow blues, and although the words are his, I've just changed the tempo. We've been playing that particular song in the band for quite a while; it's one of those barnstorming numbers that the audience really go for. *I Just Gotta Know* is a Jimmy McCracklin song and *Big Town Playboy* was originally by Eddie Taylor, who played behind Jimmy Reed. Maybe because of that, people missed out on him – but he wrote some great songs.'

The album kicks off with an old Clifton Chenier song, *Why Did You Go Last Night*, where John duets with CJ Chenier, son of the Louisiana zydeco king.

'I never knew his dad,' John adds, 'but it was funny that we got the generation gap there, especially as I always loved that song. It was great to get CJ; he was only there for the afternoon and nailed that one. It goes back to the '60s when Jack Bruce was in the band, and he and I used to sing the two vocal parts together. Then when Jack left and went onto form Cream, I had nobody left to sing it with me.'

John has a special affection for Louisiana slide wizard Sonny Landreth. Sonny recorded on his 1990 album *Sense Of Place*, and his song *Congo Square* has long been a staple of his set list. It's no surprise to find that another Landreth original, *Speak Of The Devil*, features on the new album.

'Sonny of course played in the band and he jammed with us when we were in New York last year,' Mayall says. 'His guitar playing is quite like no one else's; even if you watch him, you can't figure out what he's doing. It's a completely unique style. Best not to watch!'

Although he's modest about his guitar playing – the boogie-woogie piano of wizards like Jimmy Yancey and Albert Ammons was his early inspiration – over the years Mayall has always enjoyed coming up with designs for his guitars. His latest is eye-catching.

'This guitar – which is on the front of the new CD – started life as an Eric Johnson model Fender Stratocaster... nothing special,' he says. 'But any guitar you see me using is one that I've chopped up to make more manageable; I just don't see the point of all that extra wood!

'It's got just one pickup left, and a volume control, and I've decorated it with bits of Navajo jewellery. I think it looks pretty good. I put it out onstage before we begin, and if you look out, you can see all those front row people peering at it, trying to make out what it is!

Photo: Mike Prior

*'I chop guitars up to make them manageable. I don't see the point in that extra wood'*

'At the end of the day it's just a tool to express myself, and I like to have a bit of fun along the way. I've never really wanted to own any of those old traditional blues guitars, like a National; I don't do a lot of playing at home, and everything I use has to be lightweight and portable.'

Ever the super-experienced road warrier, Mayall mostly still manages to do without anyone to do the heavy lifting and setting-up for him.

'We do have the luxury of a tour manager in Europe, but in the US we always set up our own gear,' he explains. 'I just rent a van, and when we get to the gig, I lug it in; if there's someone hanging about we'll sometimes say "Hey, c'mon you – you're not doing anything..." but we still set it all up.'

Before his shows this autumn you'll find John doing what he always does, manning the merchandise stall, signing CDs, and enjoying meeting the faithful. So what's his secret?

'Well, I've never really drunk or smoked – but maybe my family just have good genes. As long as you've got good health, the music will keep you going.'

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# G&L
# Tribute Series Fallout

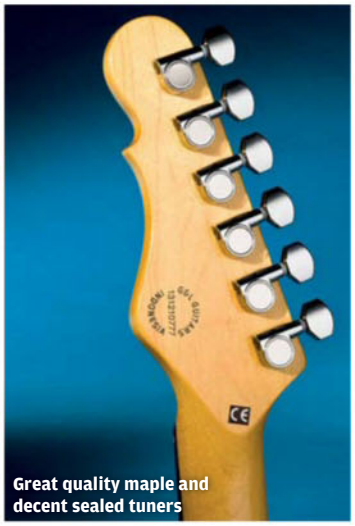
Essentially an SC-2 with a retro scratchplate, no vibrato and a new pickup combination, the Tribute Fallout offers post-punk action at a keen price. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

After Fender and then Music Man, Leo Fender set up G&L Guitars. Riffing off years of experience, he continued to experiment with new designs that mixed up the best of the old with the latest innovations. By keeping production relatively small scale, G&L was able to offer a mixture of custom options and superior workmanship that really caught the eyes and ears of the discerning player.

In 1983, the SC-2 joined the pack. This no-frills model carried the new Magnetic Field pickups, and it became a hit in the US with alt rockers such as Devo's Mark and Bob Mothersbaugh and Robert Poss from Band Of Susans. After being out of production for around 20 years the SC-2 re-entered the G&L catalogue in 2007, while the Fallout – an updated SC-2 with a hot humbucker in the bridge position and a P90 at the neck – followed in 2013. However, with both guitars sporting price tags above $1000, the appeal was a little limited. At £399 (without in-store discounts) this new Indonesian-built Tribute Series Fallout version is definitely something to shout about.

You can definitely feel the Fender heritage here. The lightweight body is reminiscent of the Musicmaster/Duo-Sonic/Mustang family, but with a 25.5" scale length the Fallout is a proper grown-up guitar. The body is made of mahogany (unlike the contemporary US-made Fallout, which uses swamp ash or alder) and the bolt-on neck is hard rock maple – a particularly nice piece of wood, as well. It's not the first time we've noticed that Indonesian factories seem to have good access to real quality timber. The rosewood fingerboard is also a fine piece of wood, and the 22 medium jumbo frets are well installed and finished. The neck is not bound but the edges are nicely rounded, which enhances the vintage-like sensation. The Fallout feels exceptionally nice to play; the combination of the medium C-shaped profile and gloss urethane finish takes you back to the '60s very effectively. The feel is snappy and bright, and the chunky G&L Saddle Lock bridge ensures that the guitar vibrates like a good 'un – it's a really zingy and loud acoustic performer. ➔

Tummy cut for comfort but no chamfered heel



Great quality maple and decent sealed tuners

## The mahogany body is reminiscent of the Mustang, but with a 25.5" scale the G&L Fallout is a real grown-up guitar

## FACTFILE
### G&L TRIBUTE SERIES FALLOUT

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody guitar. Made in Indonesia**
PRICE **£399**

BUILD **Mahogany body with hard rock maple bolt-on neck, 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, G&L branded tuners and G&L Saddle Lock bridge**
ELECTRICS **AW4470B humbucker (bridge) and AP4285B P90-style single coil (neck). Three-way selector, master tone and volume controls**
LEFT-HANDERS **Not yet**
FINISH **Fullerton red, gloss black, sonic blue**

SCALE LENGTH
**647mm/25.5"**
NECK WIDTH
**Nut 43mm**
**12th fret 51mm**
DEPTH OF NECK
**First fret 23mm**
**Twelfth fret 25mm**
STRING SPACING
**Nut 35.4mm**
**Bridge 51.5mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
**12th fret treble 2mm**
**12th fret bass 2.2mm**
WEIGHT **3.27kg/7.2lbs**

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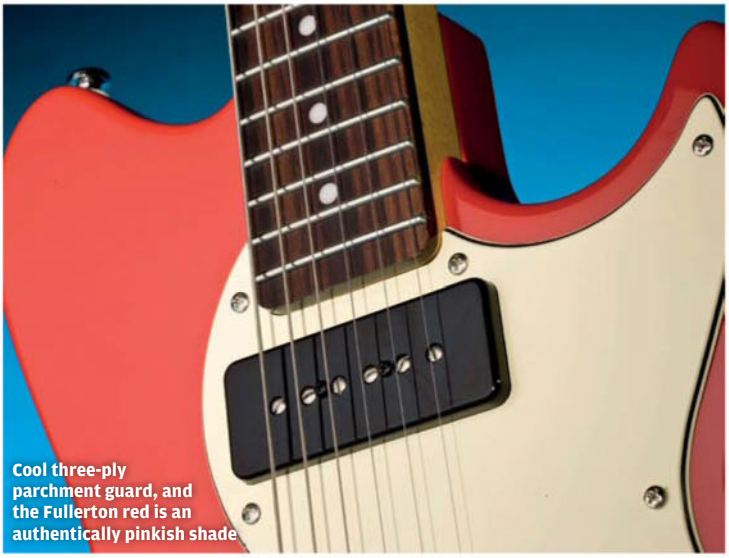

Cool three-ply parchment guard, and the Fullerton red is an authentically pinkish shade

## With an appealing no-frills approach and an excellent neck, the Fallout can dish out some really out-there sounds

As delivered from the factory the action is currently a little high at the nut, but this makes sense as player preferences vary and it's a lot easier to lower the action than it is to install a new nut. Overall, the guitar is well set up; however, the design of the heel is quite chunky, so access up past the 18th fret is somewhat restricted.

When it comes to pickups the Fallout is really aiming to please everyone. The bridge AW4470B humbucker is splittable for single coil tones, and the vintage-style AP4285B P90 riffs on the early Gibson design renowned for both mellow and raucous sounds. One of the Fallout's selling points is that these are genuine American-made G&L pickups, the same as you'll find on some US-made models. In the middle position you can mix all the different options for a set of potential unique sounds, so the guitar appears to be very flexible. Otherwise, the electrics are straightforward: master tone and volume controls and a three-way pickup selector switch. Despite the hotrod pickup mixture, the Fallout has a no-nonsense kind of character that's immediately appealing.

### Sounds

The impression that this is a guitar designed to please jangle merchants, hard rockers and all points between becomes pretty clear as soon as you plug in the Fallout. The high-output humbucker is voiced for rock, so there's a significant midrange emphasis and the tone is too coloured for clean chords, which sound a bit boxy.

There are plenty of other settings, however, and the first option is to pull up the coil tap, which gives a bright, wiry ringing tone. Our favourite clean option is the middle position setting with the coil-tapped AW4470B and the AP4285B. This is warm, bright and just a little bit quacky in the upper mids – so it's very good for country-style licks.

The neck P90 sounds very nice on its own. There's plenty of warmth and a surprisingly full bass response, which makes it great for big, piano-like chords and the smoother side of rhythm playing. It's also a great sound for underpinning vocals. Adding pedal or amp distortion to the P90 brings on authentic blues-rock and old school heavy tones aplenty.

Adding in the humbucker increases output and sustain, delivering a fine all-round solo tone. Mixing the P90 and the split bridge pickup with distortion makes for great choppy, punky chord playing; it's tight and exhilarating. For a guitar that's closer to the budget end of today's market the tone control is quite musical and it can be used to nuance your treble effectively, especially with the P90 if you are looking for a mellow funk or jazz lead sound.

On its own the bridge humbucker delivers a solid rock sound with plenty of sustain. Given its SC-2 heritage the Fallout is definitely a good starting point for sonic exploration, and you can dig deep into that pedal bag without losing the sight of where you're going. Add some basic tremolo and a short delay and you'll find a range of convincing swamp tones, while coaxing feedback out of an amp is a lot of fun.

### Verdict

With an appealing no-frills approach and a neck which would feel genuinely excellent at any price, the Tribute Series Fallout is a very likeable guitar. It may look unassuming, but it can really dish up some really out-there sounds. This is an instrument that tries very hard to have a broad appeal, and for the most part it succeeds, with a far greater tonal range than most of its competitors. At the same time you could split this model in two: at some point in the future we'd quite like to be reviewing a hardtail with two P90s and humbucker/P90 model with a vibtaro bridge. Look elsewhere for super-fast widdling up past the 12th fret – but otherwise this is a great go-anywhere guitar.

The bridge has a foot which protrudes solidly into the body, plus a screw to lock the saddles together

Knurled chrome knobs conceal a coil-tap for the bridge pickup

**FINAL SCORE**

| G&L TRIBUTE SERIES FALLOUT | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **18**/20 |
| **Playability** | **17**/20 |
| **Sound** | **17**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **18**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **17**/20 |
| TOTAL | **87%** |

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# FRET-KING & VINTAGE

## Exige PL & V130

This Fret-King and Vintage, both guitars with Trev Wilkinson input, offer an easy gateway to great rock sounds. Review by **Tim Slater**

Double-cutaway solidbody axes like the SG and the LP Junior evoke an aura of rough-and-ready rebelliousness – think Angus Young, Johnny Thunders or Keef – and in their different ways, the Fret-King Exige PL and Vintage V130 both aim to tap into a legacy of powerful, no-nonsense rock'n'roll.

Developed by British guitar designer Trevor Wilkinson under the auspices of UK-based distributor John Hornby Skewes, the Fret-King Exige PL is the flagship of the Fret-King Exige range by virtue of being the new signature guitar of Queensrÿche guitarist Parker Lundgren. Lundgren doubtless has enough clout to endorse just about any guitar he desires, and his choice of Fret-King is an encouraging sign that the British brand is managing to attract a younger generation of properly cool endorsees alongside the cluster of blues-rock veterans that have already earned their places in the company's artist roster.

By contrast, the Vintage V130 is an unabashed and much more affordable tribute to the much-loved Les Paul Junior, sticking with the same basic form, timbers and construction method, but with a couple of Wilkinson-inspired touches, including a bridge that aims to find a balance between tonefulness and practicality, and a pickup that aims to ape those fat '50s single-coils but with hum-clobbering capabilities.

The Exige PL's body and neck are both korina, as found on a vintage Flying Vee

Gold-plated WJ44 machineheads with black buttons

### The Exige PL comes in gloss black only with three Wilkinson ceramic pickups and a quirky and complex tone circuit

### Fret-King Exige PL

When it comes to morphing familiar designs into new yet strangely familiar shapes, Fret-King are masters of the art. The SG-inspired Exige features an double-cutaway korina body that aims to sidestep obvious comparisons thanks to its asymmetrical horns, a front forearm contour and a curious cutaway on the top edge of the body. Excellent access to the upper reaches of the fingerboard is one obvious benefit afforded by the basic design, and the Exige PL's offset neck heel helps the player to exploit the full range of the 22-fret ebony fingerboard that is one of the unique features of this particular model.

The korina set neck's comfortable shallow 'C' profile feels nice and sturdy, with a '70s-style volute helping to bolster the vulnerable zone where the top of the neck meets the headstock. The 22 medium jumbo frets on our review sample are mounted on top of the cream edge binding trimming ↦

### FACTFILE
### FRET KING EXIGE

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody guitar. Made in Korea**
PRICE **£719 w/gigbag**

BUILD **Korina body and neck, 22 medium jumbo frets, ebony fingerboard, gold hardware**
ELECTRICS **Three humbuckers with master tone, master volume, volume control for the middle pickup, Vari-Coil progressive coil tap**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Gloss black only**

SCALE LENGTH
**629mm/24.75"**
NECK WIDTH
**Nut 42.5mm**
**12th fret 53mm**
DEPTH OF NECK
**First fret 20mm**
**Ninth fret 23mm**
STRING SPACING
**Nut 37mm**
**Bridge 53mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
**12th fret treble 2mm**
**12th fret bass 2.2mm**
WEIGHT **3.59kg/7.9lbs**

CONTACT **JHS Ltd**
**01132 865 381**
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**Tasty take on the SG Custom with three '57 Classics, gold hardware and a Lyre vibrola**
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**Set-neck horny SG-alike in moody black with an ebony board and two EMG pickups**
RRP **£880**

**Dean**
Gran Sport Stealth
**Dean's all-black satin-finish take on the metal-friendly SG-with-EMG theme; only two pickups, though**
RRP **£799**

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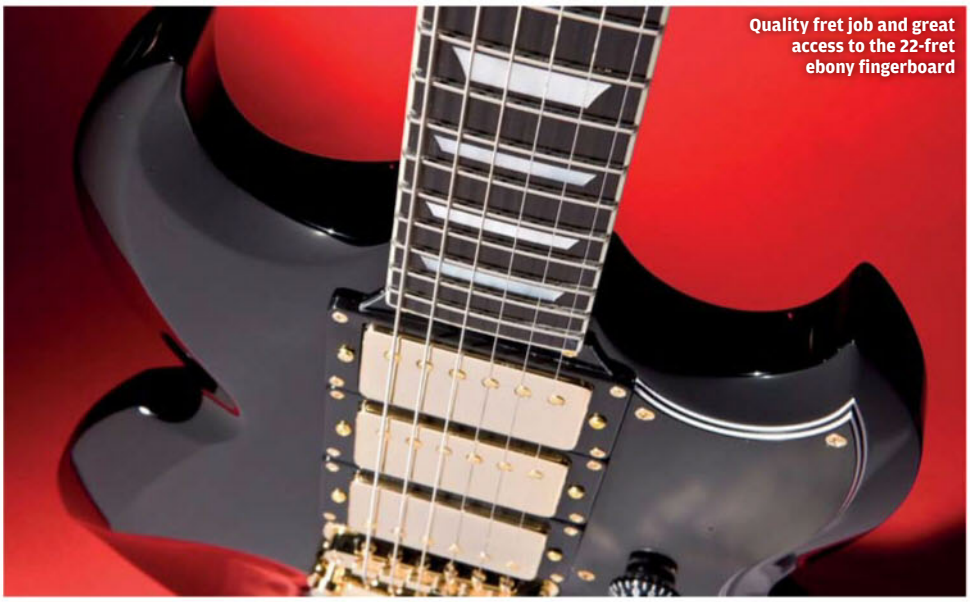
Quality fret job and great access to the 22-fret ebony fingerboard

## The Exige is geared towards classic blues-rock but also produces strident indie jangle and honky split-coil tones

the edges of the fingerboard, and playing comfort is aided by a decent setup which includes polished frets and smoothly rounded-off fret ends. The Exige PL model is only available in gloss black, and its imposing appearance is complemented by gold-plated hardware including a tunomatic-type fixed bridge and tailpiece, three gold-plated Wilkinson-designed WHHB ceramic humbuckers, and a set of attractive gold-plated Wilkinson WJ44 tuners topped off with black plastic tulip keys.

Fret-King is shipping the Exige PL with the lower strap button fitted and the upper strap button packed in a small poly bag along with the truss rod key. From this we deduce that you have the option of locating the button either in its traditional position at the neck heel or on the upper horn, Tony Iommi style. While this is very considerate of Fret-King, it might be more sensible just to fit it at the factory. Imagine the bag being accidentally thrown away or shoved into a drawer before the Exige's proud new owner notices that their new axe is missing a strap button and gets on the phone to their unsuspecting Fret-King dealer... just a thought.

### Sounds

One drawback of this particular basic design is that the control layout doesn't automatically grant the player easy access to the tone and volume knobs. The Exige addresses this by placing the rotary master volume on top of the pickguard adjacent to the bridge pickup, making it easy for the player to adjust the volume with their pinky. The remaining rotary controls also depart from the traditional pattern: there's a second volume control for the middle humbucker, a master tone control, and a Vari-Coil coil tap circuit control that gradually adjusts the selected pickup between full humbucking mode and a brighter single coil tone. Compared to a standard coil-tap switch the Vari-Coil circuit offers a much broader range of tones by progressively graduating each pickup's output between humbucking and single coil operation. In practice we can vouch that it is very effective, both as a means to extracting greater tonal range and also as a faux 'boost' when the Vari-Coil is used to kick in the full humbucker mode for soloing.

Combined with the Vari-Coil circuit, the Exige PL's triple-pickup array offers plenty of tonal variety but it can be somewhat confusing to navigate, so we called Trev Wilkinson for a quick run-through of how the Exige's electronics are configured. According to him the Exige's three-way pickup selector allows the player to select the neck and bridge pickups individually while also offering a combination of neck/bridge or neck/middle and bridge/middle. The middle pickup is always in circuit – unless the player opts to use the dedicated middle pickup volume knob to remove the middle pickup from the mix.

For ceramic humbuckers these pickups have a surprising amount of warmth; think less Seymour Duncan SH-4, more slightly overwound PAF. In isolation the neck and bridge humbuckers deliver fulsome, fruity tones with a strong dose of fat-sounding LP 'hoot' and the biting treble that SG style guitars are renowned for.

While the Exige feels like it is definitely geared more towards classic rock or blues rock players, it has plenty of usable tonal variations; strident indie jangle, honky-sounding split coil tones and even a very good approximation of a twangy yet slightly scooped Tele mid-position tone.

**FINAL SCORE**

| FRET-KING EXIGE PL | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **18**/20 |
| **Playability** | **18**/20 |
| **Sound** | **16**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **17**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **17**/20 |
| TOTAL | **86%** |

### Vintage V130

There is something irresistible about the stripped-down look of a single-pickup guitar. The LP Jr has outgrown its humble student origins and gained a legendary status as a tough street fighter, a lean, mean rockin' machine that takes no prisoners.

The V130 stays very true to this philosophy and even favours an authentic solid mahogany body and mahogany set neck over a cheaper but less authoritative-sounding alternative timber. The body is a solid yet very acoustically resonant slab – no wimpy concessions to comfort like body contouring here – and our review sample is finished in a shade of slightly off-white gloss. The glued-in neck feels closer to the slimmer feel of a modern Gibson '60s profile, which leads us to believe that the V130's comfy dimensions will find favour among a broad base of players.

Again we find a very good setup; the action is low with nary a trace of fret buzz and the fret-ends have a uniformly smooth finish. However, the nut could do with a bit of attention as the -string is sticking slightly in its slot. Intonation can be an issue with fixed-bridge guitars but the V130 features a chunky chrome-plated Wilkinson GTBCR wraparound bridge that allows some scope for adjustment when the need arises.

Trev Wilkinson also designed the V130's lone P90-style stacked ceramic pickup. It features a period-correct 'dogear' mounting, and on closer inspection it's nice to see that the

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## FACTFILE
### VINTAGE V130

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody guitar. Made in Korea**
PRICE **£269**

BUILD **Mahogany body and set neck, rosewood fingerboard, 22 medium jumbo frets, stacked WP100B pickup, Wilkinson wraparound GTBCR bridge**
ELECTRICS **One volume, one tone control**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Vintage white or satin cherry**

SCALE LENGTH
**628mm/24.75"**
NECK WIDTH
**Nut 42mm**
**12th fret 52mm**
DEPTH OF NECK
**First fret 20mm**
**Ninth fret 23mm**
STRING SPACING
**Nut 35mm**
**Bridge 52mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
**12th fret treble 1.8mm**
**12th fret bass 2.1mm**
WEIGHT **3.27kg/7.2lbs**

CONTACT **JHS Ltd**
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**Fret-King**
Black Label DBC
**Higher quality take on the LP Jr than the Vintage, with a single-coil P90**
RRP **£599**

Mahogany body and neck: satin cherry is an option

Neat semi-adjustable bridge and a P90-style stacked WP100 pickup

# The Vintage V130 delivers a convincing SG Jr sound, a mixture of shimmering transparency and roughhouse snarl

Tele-style knurled steel volume and tone control knobs tip a hat to the types fitted to Dice, Keith Richards' '58 LP Jr.

The tuners are vintage-style Wilkinson WJ15s with white plastic buttons and they appear to work well, although the guitar's tuning stability is slightly marred by the nut requiring some fettling. Slung on a strap the V130 has a tendency to feel a bit neck-heavy and it doesn't feel as planted as the Fret-King Exige PL, but some fiddling with your strap adjustment – either that or developing a Joey Ramone 'legs apart' stance with the guitar slung well below belt buckle height – should help to find a balance.

## Sounds

Plugged in, the V130's resonance translates into a convincing take on an archetypal LP Jr sound, a mixture of shimmering transparency and roughhouse snarl. Bash out a big open G chord and the stacked pickup delivers the clarity one would expect from a P90 single coil while its twin stacked coils do a grand job of virtually eliminating 60-cycle mains hum.

That said, 'plush' is an adjective you wouldn't choose to describe this guitar's tones; big-ass riffs and crunchy chords are its stock-in-trade. Whereas a traditional PAF tends to gently pump up single notes as though on a cushion of air, the V130 stabs its way into the mix with all the carefully-measured subtlety of a gladiator coming home from a hard day at the Coliseum only to discover his wife in bed with the next door neighbour. Smooth jazzers will probably not find much currency with the V130's uncompromising tones but plenty will enjoy plugging it into a crunchy-sounding amp and extracting some authentic post-punk sounds. The V130 may be a bit of a one-trick pony but it's a very capable little rock guitar and a great way to buy into the mythology of the double cutaway sound and feel without straining the wallet.

Three-on-a-plate WJ15 tuners with cream plastic buttons

## Verdict

Fret-King is a brand that still struggles for credibility despite having some outstanding players and fine instruments in its stable. Parker Lundgren may not exactly be a household name, but this guitar signals what we hope is a fresh start from the British concern. Compared to a Gibson SG, the Exige PL's off-kilter design and complex tone circuit are somewhat quirky but it represents excellent value for money thanks to its impressive build quality and wealth of Trev Wilkinson ancillary equipment. On the other hand the Vintage V130 almost seems ludicrously inexpensive, especially given that it delivers virtually everything one would expect from this classic design for the fraction of the price of an original, with the added bonus of high quality hardware and an all-mahogany construction. Brand snobbery is an affliction that we can all suffer from but when you evaluate these guitars on their sounds and playability it's plainly obvious that any musician worth their salt will be able to take either one straight out of the box and get the job done.

## FINAL SCORE

| VINTAGE V130 | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **15**/20 |
| **Playability** | **18**/20 |
| **Sound** | **18**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **18**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **18**/20 |
| TOTAL | **87%** |

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# BURNS LONDON

## Custom Elite Signature Marvin & Club Series Cobra

Few guitars can shout 'British classic' quite as loudly as a Burns. **Marcus Leadley** checks out a pair of retro rockers which can do a lot more than just play Wonderful Land

The original Burns guitars came along at a very particular point in the history of popular music. In the early '60s, a sudden explosion in interest in guitar music combined with high import tariffs on American goods created an environment where the much-coveted Fenders were rare birds in the UK, and British makers found themselves with the opportunity to both imitate and innovate. Burns London Limited only endured until 1965, when the company was sold to Baldwin. In 1974, after a couple of false starts, Jim Burns came back with new instruments. While company names and fortunes changed, he managed to keep production rolling until 1984. Burns London, with Barry Gibson at the helm and Jim Burns as a consultant, came along in 1994. Since then we've had a regular dose of classic reissues and some contemporary twists.

Originals had the strap button behind the horn but here it's normal

Repro Van Gent tuners add that archaic touch

### The Burns Marvin is a perfect example of eccentric British ingenuity, but UK assembled from parts made in China

### Burns Marvin

The Burns Marvin, a collaboration between Jim Burns and Shadows guitarist Hank Marvin, is a perfect example of British ingenuity. No one can say a Marvin doesn't look a bit like a Strat – but in terms of pickups and hardware, it's a different beast. A certain amount of the design was driven by an effort to improve on Fender's previous work, for the 1960s wasn't an era when things were set in stone, and people were trying to do things better.

Today's Marvin arrives in a silver snakeskin tolex case full of goodies: leather strap, toolkit, cleaning cloth and certificate of authenticity. White is the finish, and with the faux tortoiseshell scratchplates the guitar looks stylish and eccentric. The bodies and necks for Custom Elite series are fabricated in China but the guitars are assembled in the UK, and the standard of finishing and set-up is very good. This body is made from American alder and the bolt-on neck is Canadian hard rock maple.

You'll probably either love or hate the scroll design of the headstock and the reproduction Van Gent-style tuners; however, the mass balances the guitar well and the string path is nice and straight, which helps to reduce tuning issues. Moving down to the rosewood fingerboard we encounter a quirk of many vintage British guitars: a zero fret. These pretty much guarantee a great first-position action and a zingy and chiming response from the open stings and they minimise the opportunity ↦

### FACTFILE

**CUSTOM ELITE SIGNATURE MARVIN**

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody electric guitar. Assembled in the UK from Chinese parts**
PRICE **£1299**

BUILD **American alder body, Canadian maple neck, 21-fret rosewood fingerboard (maple option), zero fret, Rez-O-Tube bridge, tortie pickguard and Van Gent-style tuners**
ELECTRICS **Three Rez-O-Matic single coils master volume and tone control (with push/pull on one for two extra pickup settings), five-way selector.**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Fiesta red, white and greenburst**

SCALE LENGTH
**650mm/25.5"**
NECK WIDTH
**Nut 43.8mm**
**12th fret 51.6mm**
DEPTH OF NECK
**First fret 21mm**
**Ninth fret 24.8mm**
STRING SPACING
**Nut 36mm**
**Bridge 50.8mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
**12th fret treble 1.6mm**
**12th fret bass 2.2mm**
WEIGHT **3.5kg/7.75lb**

CONTACT **Burns London**
**0208 7833 638**
**www.burnsguitars.com**

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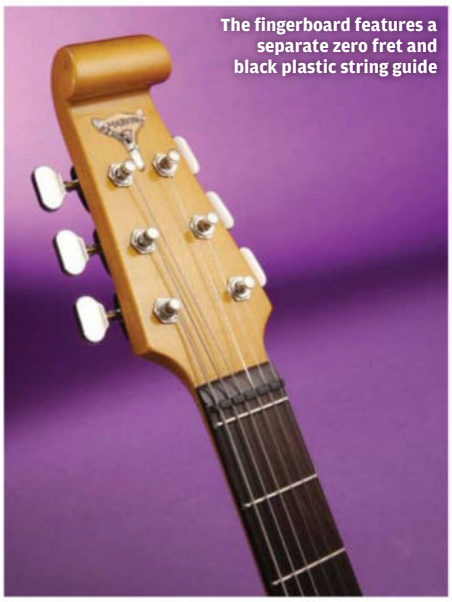
The Rez-O-Tube vibrato with its handguard is a marvel of wacky engineering


The fingerboard features a separate zero fret and black plastic string guide

## The Marvin is superb for bright, warm clean tones, with a chime that works brilliantly for ’60s licks and chords

for pitch errors between fretted and unfretted notes. If you’re a player who mostly plays around the first five frets, check this option out.

Moving on down the neck, the unbound rosewood fingerboard is excellent. The narrow-gauge fretwire has a nice vintage feel and the C profile neck feels great. The high gloss finish enhances the vintage feel; to me, this is what a guitar neck should feel like. Neck access past the 17th fret starts to get a bit compromised by the heel joint, but a good technique will get you comfortably all the way to the 21st fret, where the intonation is still spot-on.

At the other end of the string path is the impressive edifice of the Burns Rez-O-Tube vibrato, which gets its name from the individual metal tubes though which the strings pass from the back of the guitar. The entire bridge assembly is mounted on a solid aluminium plate. It’s spring-loaded and pivots on a knife-edge. Spring tension can be adjusted at the tail end, and the chunky side-mounted arm can be adjusted for swivel tension and angle. The palm rest is a necessary feature, as it stops a wayward hand whacking the aluminium plate. It’s a quirky design, but there’s method in the madness: when properly set up, the guitar stays in tune well.

Burns also designed the Rez-O-Matic pickups for the Marvin. These were designed to sound more ‘Fenderish’ than the earlier Tri-Sonics and were designed around alnico magnets rather than ceramic. The Marvin sports three, and they’re wired via a five-way selector – not a three-way as on the original. This configuration gives the three pickup voices plus two ‘in between’ out-of-phase voices. There’s a push/pull on the rear tone control that switches the neck pickup on, which means that you can have bridge and neck pickup on with the selector hard back. In any of the middle positions you have all three pickups on together – so that’s a full seven options from just three pickups. The guitar also has a master volume control and independent tone controls.

Impressive quantity of Burns case candy

| FINAL SCORE | |
|---|---|
| CUSTOM ELITE SIGNATURE MARVIN | |
| **Build Quality** | **18**/20 |
| **Playability** | **18**/20 |
| **Sound** | **17**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **17**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **18**/20 |
| TOTAL | **88%** |

## Sounds

If you want bright yet warm clean tones, the Marvin is a superb performer. All the different factors add up to a chiming sound that works brilliantly for ’60s melodic licks, country-inspired fingerpicking and clean chords. The pickups really showcase the natural sound of the instrument, so the sound of the neck pickup into an uncoloured amp sounds very acoustic, with a lovely full bass, or you can roll off a little top end for a super-smooth jazzy lead tone that still has excellent clarity.

The out-of-phase voices are less coloured then the Fender equivalents, but exhibit all the noise-free loveliness that make them ideal for recording as well as live playing. The middle position offers a full, bright rhythm sound and bridge pickup is somehow twangy, smooth and scratchy all at the same time. Across all the pickup settings there’s a pleasing sense of definition and focus to the pick-edge sound. The extra neck/bridge combination is a very full frequency option that’s great for strumming and singing. Using all the pickups together gives a great funk rhythm sound.

There is a tendency to assume that the Shadows sound was clean, clean, clean all the way, but in the live situation the amps of the day often sputtered into breakup. It’s all part of the territory, and the Marvin loves to growl. The pickups have a very dynamic response so there’s a definite reward for hitting the strings harder: it’s a 3D rock’n’roll sound that eats surf music and can get very raunchy if pushed a bit harder. Moving into slightly higher gain territory brings on a gritty, jangly pop tone, though excessive amounts of gain choke the sound, so it’s not an ideal choice for hard rock or modern metal.

## Club Series Cobra

The Cobra is based on the Drifter Custom, a guitar with its roots in the late ’90s. This Cobra asserts its Burns credentials by taking on a trio of Tri-Sonic pickups but in a smaller, redesigned form. The problem with the old Tri-Sonics was that they required a larger body rout and a custom-cut pick guard; Burns says this redesign used the same split ceramic magnets and loose coil winding technique as the originals, but it manages to squeeze the internals into a narrow casing.

The Cobra is Chinese-built and at £249 is very, very good value for money – and, remarkably, it comes in a well-built hard case. What you don’t get are

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## FACTFILE
### CLUB SERIES COBRA

DESCRIPTION
**Solidbody electric guitar. Made in China**
PRICE **£249**

BUILD **Maple bolt-on neck with 22 frets (plus zero fret) rosewood fingerboard, body unspecified. Knife-edge vibrato system, Burns own-brand tuners**
ELECTRICS **Three Mini Tri-Sonic pickups, master volume and independent tone control (with push/pull action on one for two extra pickup settings), five-way pickup selector**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes**
FINISH **Guards red, white, baby blue, black**

SCALE LENGTH
**650mm/25.5"**
NECK WIDTH
**Nut 42.5mm**
**12th fret 52.5mm**
DEPTH OF NECK
**First fret 20mm**
**Ninth fret 22.2mm**
STRING SPACING
**Nut 36mm**
**Bridge 53mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
**12th fret treble 1.8mm**
**12th fret bass 2.0mm**
WEIGHT **3.6kg/7.9lb**

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Burns neck joints never were a thing of beauty, but it's solid enough

No Rez-O-Tube here, just a standard knife-edge trem

## With a very particular brash, bright, slightly angular quality the Cobra is a natural for jangly pop and alt-rock

quite the same materials and attention to detail as you do with the Marvin. The body timber's not specified, though the neck is maple. The headstock is scarf-jointed on; the rosewood fingerboard has a couple of nasty nicks in it and there's some serious scuffing up past the 12th fret on the high E side, though this doesn't affect the playing. The neck is quite broad and the fingerboard relatively flat, so the feel is fast and rocky. The medium-jumbo frets could do with a dressing and the board feels in need of polishing, as there are a few sticky spots. The intonation, however, is spot on, and bar minor issues the guitar plays very well. The action is low and fast, so once again the zero fret seems to be doing the trick nicely.

The Burns London vibrato uses the same knife-edge approach as the Rez-O-Tube, but this is basically an adaptation of the standard, most common vibrato. It's solidly made, well chromed and the guitar stays in tune.

The maple neck has a scarf-jointed headstock

As well as the three Tri-Sonic pickups the Cobra sports independent tone controls and a master volume. There's a five-way selector and once again you can access two extra voices by pulling up on the rear tone control.

### Sounds

While the Cobra doesn't sound like the Marvin, both instruments still manage to sound like Burns guitars. The Cobra has a very particular brash, bright, slightly angular quality that's instantly appealing; if you think you know single coil S-type tones, think again. While the bridge pickup tone is a little flat in the midrange for clean chords, it becomes a total monster when you load on the gain. No problem with a contemporary rock tone – and winding off the tone control creates a remarkably cool Brian May sound that's really good for wailing solos. The middle pickup on its own is good for clean chords, and the neck pickup is very melodic and jazzy. Both the out-of-phase settings work well with midrange drive, and the dynamics feel very responsive. The extra pull-up voices are great for rhythm playing and creating a jazzier clean tone.

### Verdict

Who's going to buy a Marvin? Shadows fans who've decided that money in the bank doesn't make them happy? Good decision. At the same time, this is a guitar for anyone who wants a vast array of hi-fi clean sounds; it has a real aficionado's tone. It's also a natural choice for anyone who likes classic surf, early rock'n'roll or country, plus their more contemporary punky siblings.

There's nothing about the Marvin that traps it in the '60s; like any really good guitar, it can hop decades and genres.

While the Cobra is a budget model, it punches well above its weight. It's much more suited to metal and hard rock than the Marvin, and it's a natural for jangly pop and alt-rock. The remodelled Tri-Sonics are about 200 per cent better that the pickups you find on most budget guitars, so if you're starting out, want a better budget guitar or simply fancy adding a bit of Burns to your collection without breaking the bank, the Cobra is a fine option.

### FINAL SCORE

| BURNS CLUB SERIES COBRA | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **17**/20 |
| **Playability** | **17**/20 |
| **Sound** | **18**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **19**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **18**/20 |
| TOTAL | **89%** |

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# EX-175

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# BLACKSTAR
## ID:Core Stereo 40

The clever new Blackstar is a do-it-all home practice amp, crammed with hi-tech bells and whistles – and yet it costs no more than a pretty average phone. Review by **Richard Purvis**

Are you serious? A 40W combo that's so light it swings from a fabric strap rather than a handle? And it costs about as much as two Barry Manilow tickets, plus maybe a kebab on the way home... and it's a Blackstar? Well, the company may be famed for its pure-toned valve amps, but you've probably guessed by now that this isn't one of them. It's a practice amp with onboard FX and digital tweakability – the biggest of a three-model series, the others weighing in at 10W and 20W – and 40 solid-state watts are nothing like as loud as the tube-powered equivalent so this shouldn't be too overpowering for anyone's bedroom.

Inside are a stereo pair of six-inch 'full-range' speakers designed to reproduce the whole spectrum rather than just the mid-focused frequencies of a normal guitar cab. This is important, because the ID:Core's line-in socket is a key part of the package: you can plug your smartphone or MP3 player in here and play along to records at proper hi-fi quality. There's also a speaker-emulated DI output that doubles as a headphone socket for jamming along without waking the hamster, and USB for editing and sharing presets via a free piece of Mac/PC software called Blackstar Insider.

The big knob selects between six user-writable voice presets

Six-inch drivers won't fill a hall but the stereo spread is wild

## The ID:Core is a stereo practice amp with onboard FX, an MP3 jamming input and USB for editing and sharing presets

Your starting point for using this amp, whether or not you insist on opening up your tonal options with Insider's three-band EQ, is an array of six core voices on a rotary switch: two clean, two crunchy, and two rocky. Add Gain and Volume controls, plus Blackstar's ISF control for transatlantic tone-shaping, and that's quite a palette before you've even got to the FX section (which we will do). One preset can be stored for each of the six voice settings, simply by holding down the Manual button, or you can press that button once to ignore the presets and go into – predictably enough – manual mode.

Those presets will include the FX, and you can have up to three running at a time: one reverb, one delay and one modulation. Select which type ➔

### FACTFILE
**BLACKSTAR ID:CORE STEREO 40**

DESCRIPTION **40W (20W + 20W) stereo modelling combo with digital FX, two 6" speakers. Made in China**
PRICE **£159**

CONTROLS **Guitar input, line/MP3 input, emulated DI/headphones output; six-way Voice control and Manual override button; Gain, Volume, EQ (ISF); FX selector buttons (Modulation, Delay, Reverb) and Tap tempo, rotary FX control and effect Level; Power switch, footswitch input; USB socket**
ACCESSORIES **FS-11 footcontroller for patch-switching and FX on/off, £19.99**
DIMENSIONS **43cm wide, 34cm high, 19cm deep**
WEIGHT **6.2kg/14lbs**

CONTACT **Blackstar Amplification 01604 817817 www.blackstaramps.com**

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**Line 6**
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**The latest version of the ever-popular Cube has plenty of decent sounds and good digital FX**
RRP **£235**

**Yamaha**
THR10X
**Stereo guitar amp disguised as an old-fashioned portable tape recorder, with similar connectivity to the Blackstar**
RRP **£299**

The controls are simple, but more tweakability is available via USB

## The stereo reverbs and delays are great, with a sound-field that seems impossible from such a compact source

you want to activate or adjust, and all the editing is done on a single rotary control split into four sections – there are four effects of each type – plus a Tap tempo button and Level knob. It's not ideal but it's efficient, and again you have the option of much more flexible and detailed manipulation using Insider. The reverbs and delays, by the way, make use of a feature called Super Wide Stereo that promises a uniquely panoramic soundstage. Hardly seems likely from such a teeny box, does it?

A word about construction: as you might expect from the price, we're not dealing with artisan craftsmanship. If you unscrew and lift out the top panel you'll find that the 'chassis' is basically... well, the top panel, with one PCB slung just below it, while in the space below you'll see two little speakers and a lot of particleboard. Basic stuff, but you won't be touring North America with this. It's a pity the corner protectors don't fit a little more snugly, though.

## In use

The mains adapter plugs into a stompbox-style socket on the back board and our ID:Core powers up discreetly, though there's a certain amount of noise even with everything at zero. 'Clean Warm' looks like a good place to start. It seems quiet for a 40W amp, solid-state or not, but pushing the Volume close to maximum fills the room with a sound that's Haribo-sweet, if lightweight. There's a little bit of grittiness if you crank the Gain, and the ISF control takes you from very Fender-ish tones at one end to a more woody Marshall-like midrange at the other. Changing to 'Clean Bright' brings no less bottom end but way more sparkle, like an exaggerated version of engaging the Bright switch on a blackface Fender.

Both Crunch voices are impressive. This can be a hard trick for little amps, but Blackstar seems to have mapped out the whole 'neither clean nor distorted' zone without any trouble.

The full-on overdriven sounds are just as clear and crisp, with some factory-set gating to push down the buzzy noisefloor between squalling freak-outs, and here's where you might start thinking about backing off the Volume, depending on the size of the room you're in. That's not to say it's a genuinely giggable amp, however – unless your idea of gigging is playing Burt Bacharach tunes in a near-deserted winebar at 3am.

Now then, the FX. First, the Super Wide Stereo reverbs and delays are great. The ID:Core creates a sound-field that seems impossible from such a compact source, and at certain angles you'll swear the sound is coming from behind you. The modulations are more than respectable – choose between phaser, flanger, chorus and tremolo – and you can control wobble speed with the Tap button. There's also a tuner, accessed by pressing Manual and Tap buttons together, which uses the FX section's red/green LEDs as a display.

These tidy tones sound even better through a good set of headphones. Could it be that a touch of flattering compression has been applied to this output? The smoothness and slightly clicky attack suggest so, and you can see why this might have been thought a handy way of helping the guitar sit in a mix – for either DI demo recording or headphone jamming with records. Speaking of which, the hi-fi quality for MP3 tracks coming out of either speakers or headphones is excellent.

## Verdict

There's a great tradition of plonking an amp between the speakers of the stereo and strumming along with your heroes, and it's a tradition that clever new amps like the ID:Core are fast rendering obsolete. Navigating it takes no time, and you'll have plenty of fun even if you never uncoil the USB cable. More EQ and FX controls on the amp itself would be welcome, but that might compromise its intuitive simplicity and distract from the main idea, which is to create an ultra-portable product with decent tones at an alarmingly low price.

With a weight of just 14lbs, a simple strap is enough

The power socket takes a Boss-style 2.1mm plug

**FINAL SCORE**

| BLACKSTAR ID:CORE STEREO 40 | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **15**/20 |
| **Versatility** | **19**/20 |
| **Sound** | **17**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **19**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **16**/20 |
| TOTAL | **86%** |

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# HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS

## Artist 20+RT

This brand-new British handmade 20W 1x12" valve combo aims to tick every box in the busy player's want-list. Review by **Richard Purvis**

As anyone who's ever leapt out of a seventh-floor window clinging to the handles of an AC30 will tell you, amplifiers are not like aeroplanes. But engineering is engineering, and what better way to bring some lateral thinking into amp design than to approach it from the perspective of a completely different industry? Peter Hamstead has a background in avionics and radar, and he's proud to state that his debut guitar amplifier is not based on any of the classic designs of the '60s. The Artist 20+RT was conceived and refined with input from a number of guitarists in his native Cambridgeshire, and the only goal was to make it sound as good as possible. Can't argue with that, eh?

So we're dealing with a 1x12" combo that's handmade in the UK, and the first sign of that dogma-dodging ethos comes in the choice of output valves: the standard formula for a British amp in the 20W zone is a pair of EL84s, but here we find EL34s, cathode-biased and punching well below their usual wattage weight. Why? Because, explains Hamstead, it sounds good.

It looks good too, in a 'photo negative' sort of way: the dark grille cloth, piping and metal corners contrast dramatically with the cream-coloured vinyl, while the brushed steel control panel and white knobs contrast with pretty much everything. It's a colour scheme that, coincidentally or not, nicely matches the front-mounted Celestion G12M-65 Creamback – a variant on the classic Greenback with higher power handling and, unlike most Celestions, still made in the UK.

You're probably sick of hearing how amazingly well-constructed all these boutique amps are – particularly if you're not lucky enough to have had one in your shopping trolley just yet – but please bear with us for at least one more time: this amp is amazingly well-constructed. The vinyl has been perfectly applied with no visible folds or seams; all the carpentry joints, edges and screws are squeaky-tight; and the corner protectors have been riveted rather than screwed. Maybe amplifiers can be like aeroplanes after all.

Off comes the back panel, out come the four top bolts, and here comes our all-important sniff around the ➔

The Artist 20+RT comes with reverb, trem and Voice for adding bite to solos

Peter Hamstead has a background in avionics and radar, and the goal was to make his amp sound as good as possible

### FACTFILE

**HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS ARTIST 20+RT**

DESCRIPTION **20W 1x12" valve combo with reverb and tremolo; 2 x EL34 and 3 x ECC83 valves, solid-state rectification. Made in UK**
PRICE **£1899**

FRONT PANEL **Hi and Lo inputs; Gain, Bass, Treble, Voice switch; reverb Depth, Tone and bypass switch; tremolo Depth, Speed and bypass switch; Master volume**
REAR PANEL **On/off and pentode/triode switches, 8ohm and 16ohm speaker outputs, footswitch socket, FX loop send and return**
ACCESSORIES **Four-way footswitch included for voice, reverb, tremolo and FX loop bypass**
DIMENSIONS **58cm wide, 54cm high, 27cm deep**
WEIGHT **22.8kg/50lbs**

CONTACT **Music Street**
**01480 431222**
**musicstreet.co.uk**
**hamsteadsoundworks.com**

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RRP **£1495**

**Tone King**
Sky King
**US boutique royalty: a 35W combo with reverb, tremolo and the same Creamback speaker as the Hamstead**
RRP **£2449**

**JPF**
King Charles 30
**EL34-powered combo from the London maker that wears its Britishness on its two-tone sleeve**
RRP **£1075**

Rear panel supplies an FX loop and a pentode/triode switch

## This amp has been set up to give murderous amounts of power-tube saturation at reasonable levels

innards of the beast. The valve bases and sockets are chassis-mounted and it's not unreasonable to describe the Artist 20+RT as predominantly handwired, but look away now if you're a hardliner about this sort of thing, because there are printed tracks on the main eyelet board. The reverb and tremolo sections, meanwhile, are mounted on a separate PCB.

Reverb and tremolo, you say? Yes, the 'R' and 'T' don't just stand for 'right tasty': there's a full-length spring tank tucked inside the bottom of the cab and controls for Depth and Tone on the front panel, alongside Depth and Speed for the trem. These also have bypass switches, as does an intriguing little feature called Voice, but the good news is that the Artist 20+RT comes complete with a four-way footswitch to manage all of them, plus the FX loop. Pop a suitably transparent-toned overdrive pedal on top of the amp, plugged in at the back with a couple of short patch cables, and that footswitch turns this simple-looking combo into a two-channel gigging chameleon. And it's a chameleon that can change size as well as colour – in addition to the Master volume control, there's a pentode/triode switch for half-power operation.

### In use

There's no standby switch so we'll keep Gain and Master down low, turn off all the switches and wake the green light. The first issue to settle is how high to crank that last control – some amps are at their happiest with Master fully open (or indeed not there at all) so the power tubes can stretch their big orange legs, but that's not the way things work here: with single-coil pickups and Gain barely on at all, the Hamstead's output stage is pushed into grinding overdrive before Master is even past noon. Remembering that this is only a 20W amp, despite the EL34s, we'll abandon all thoughts of huge, headroomy cleans and rein everything in for the moment.

So both controls come back to 10 o'clock and we're presented with a rich and solid tone with a vaguely British accent that owes no obvious debt to Vox, Marshall or any other one maker. It's clean-ish, but maybe not pure enough for country cluckers. The EQ offers plenty of scope for tailoring sound at both ends of the spectrum, and the Voice switch adds a hefty slap of upper-mids bark. You shouldn't have trouble finding a nice basic tone here with single-coils, humbuckers or P90s.

Then you can start messing it up a bit. The tremolo has a pleasingly natural wave shape and an extravagantly wide speed range, from rapid-fire judder to slower than the breath of a snoozing whale, and the reverb can go as cavernous as you'll ever need. The reverb generally sounds best with the Tone control on or close to maximum, which begs the question of why there *is* a Tone control, but it's nice to have the option of some subtle damping.

Now we're faced with two different ways of cranking the gain. Winding it up at the preamp end brings plenty of smooth and powerful overdrive, but you get more 'clonk' and less fizz by hammering the Master control instead. The rocking tones on offer here are hard and chunky, especially with humbuckers, calling to mind the EL34-driven power of a big old Marshall or Orange. Then flick the Voice switch and you go from clonk to über-clonk – any more woody and it'd be a cricket bat. Moving down to triode operation makes the tone of all this a little less vibrant but live engineers will thank you for it, and so might your ears one day.

### Verdict

Perhaps the most likeable thing about this amp is the way the Master volume has been set up to give murderous amounts of power-tube saturation at reasonable levels – if nothing else, it's compelling evidence for the theory that big bottles distort nicer than little ones. Is there room in the market for another expensive UK amp-maker? Let's hope so, because Hamstead's blinker-free approach has led to a smart-sounding combo that covers a lot of ground without striving to copy anything else. Avionics' loss is our gain.

For a single-channel amp there's a lot of adaptability here

Celestion Creamback gives a G12M sound with higher power handling

| FINAL SCORE | |
|---|---|
| HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS ARTIST 20+RT | |
| **Build Quality** | **19**/20 |
| **Versatility** | **19**/20 |
| **Sound** | **18**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **15**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **19**/20 |
| TOTAL | **90%** |

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Singer-Songwriter **Ben Montague**

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# ELECTRO-HARMONIX

## Lumberjack Log Overdriver & EHXtortion JFET Overdrive

Looking for some new flavours to spice up your solos? **Marcus Leadley** tests Mike Matthews' latest batches of hot sauce – one simple, and one complex...

Electro-Harmonix has come a long way since the early '70s when a combination of great sound, decent prices and reliability turned the likes of David Gilmour and Carlos Santana on to the Big Muff Pi – and also Hendrix, according to EHX's Mike Matthews. Looking though the company's catalogue you can count 96 different pedals: delays, loopers, tremolos, reverbs, and no less than 34 distortions, fuzzes and overdrives. The Lumberjack arrives with the promise of a totally new and unique approach; the EHXtortion is billed as a new flagship model, one that's all about delivering maximum tone and flexibility from a package designed to offer a very amp-like sound.

### Lumberjack Log Overdriver

There's a lot of speculation online concerning where the logarithmic aspect of this pedal actually comes in (type of potentiometer? diodes in the feedback circuit?) and Electro-Harmonix doesn't seem to be rushing to clarify the issue. What they do say is that the Lumberjack's character is very dependent on your playing dynamic. The unit's not designed for screaming rock tones: think clean boost through to ragged break-up and gritty distortion.

Out of the box the unit has a contemporary EHX look with a black, orange and white graphic printed onto the top of the standard Nano series diecast enclosure. There are just three knobs: Volume, Boost and Log Factor. There's also a stomp switch, a red LED and mono Input/output sockets.

### In use

It soon becomes clear that there's a lot more to the Lumberjack than you'd expect. The three knobs seem very interactive, and working out how to control things with any degree of subtly takes a bit of head-scratching.

The best place to start is with a clean boost function. Boost pedals are very useful as they allow you to controllably nudge your level at critical points in a song or drive the amp into natural overdrive – very helpful if you have a single-channel amp. Setting the Log and Boost knobs to zero and winding up the

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Volume to max turns out to be the best place to start. Here, your guitar sound, tone and volume are basically the same when the pedal is bypassed or engaged. Switching on does lift the noise floor a little, but this is acceptable for a pedal at the budget end of the spectrum. Turning the boost control increases your output significantly. Up to about 12 o'clock this remains clean, then the amps starts to really hot up. The pedal doesn't seem to colour the basic sound of your set up, so a big thumbs-up.

Leaving the Boost knob at zero and turning the Log knob brings on the grit. It's subtle up to 12 o'clock and then things start to get interesting. There's a sweet spot here where the breakup is very unpredictable, and playing dynamic does indeed control this. Suddenly every note sounds slightly different, and this can be manipulated to great effect. Bringing in the Boost can really nuance the sound, and if things start to get too loud you can rein back the volume without changing the overall character of the sound. Moving past this point on the Log control seems to drive the top end into progressively more bite, but at the upper limit it's somewhat raspy and the sustain characteristic feels a little choked.

## EHXtortion JFET Overdrive

With black graphics and lots of knobs, you can tell this pedal means business. JFET transistors are high-impedance devices, and in this configuration the circuit is designed to emulate a tube amp – and not only to deliver vintage overdrive and modern hi-gain, but also to 'smarten up your clean tones'.

In addition to the basic Volume and Gain there's a four-stage Pregain control offering a Full or Tight preset for a lower gain profile or a higher-gain hotrod sound (listening to online content from EHX suggests that Marshall and Dumble were the benchmark sounds). You also get Treble, Middle and Bass controls – and then you get the extra Volume and Gain controls of the boost section. This is slightly confusing: despite

the separate Boost footswitch this is not a completely separate function. This boost functions over the top of the primary section. When the unit is engaged, switching on the Boost control deactivates the normal Volume and Gain controls and references those in the Boost section, but the Pregain and tone controls remain active. This lets you create a louder or more driven replica of the overdrive tone you've already created, in effect adding two channels to your amp while retaining some logical tonal continuity. Further flexibility is offered in the form of a jack for a momentary footswitch to let you switch to boost mode only when the switch is depressed, so you can easily make sections of a solo louder or create volume or gated-stutter effects. The unit also has a DI out, so you can connect to a PA or PC for recording.

## In use

Perhaps the biggest issue with this pedal is that you can't bypass the tone controls; you're always starting from the point of colouring the basic output of your rig. This suggests you work with a big, clean amp rather than a boutique rocker with a tone you want to preserve... or you could use this pedal to make a budget amp sound a lot better.

Setting the tone controls to roughly noon, adding a little Gain and then working the Volume lets you match your basic signal pretty closely. It's a kind of 'preamp mode', and it can shape the sound very nicely. The tone controls are responsive and you can introduce exactly the amount of gain you want – so you can, if you wish, simply sculpt a range of cool clean tones. Then you can switch over to Boost mode, ramp up Volume and Gain and, hey presto – you now have a good clean tone plus a driven version. Alternatively, start out with a basic amp tone for clean work, generate the overdrive sound you want, and programme the boost section to give you a second version with more oomph. When it comes to overdrive shaping there's a huge amount of flexibility and the Pregain setting lets you get close to the character of different vintage and modern amps.

## Verdict

The Lumberjack is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It's an effective clean boost which doesn't come with a boutique price tag and also a very characterful overdrive. We're not especially charmed by its full-on sound – the sustain feels a little buzzy – but we like the lush, dynamic overdrive it generates at the midpoint, and you can really sculpt your sound into something a bit unique.

The EXTortion offers a more familiar palette of overdrive sounds in a well thought-out package: it's a real working pedal designed to help you get the job done. The DI function is very useful – ideal if you practice with a PA or like to record ideas when folks are sleeping. You can use it to add a different sounding 'channel' to your rig, it can make a budget amp sound a good deal better, or it can massage a great basic tone and end up delivering some truly professional sounds.

**FINAL SCORE**

| LUMBERJACK LOG OVERDRIVE | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **18**/20 |
| **Usability** | **18**/20 |
| **Sound** | **18**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **18**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **18**/20 |
| TOTAL | **90%** |

**FINAL SCORE**

| EHXTORTION JFET OVERDRIVE | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **18**/20 |
| **Usability** | **18**/20 |
| **Sound** | **18**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **17**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **18**/20 |
| TOTAL | **89%** |

## FACTFILE

### Electro-Harmonix Lumberjack Log Overdrive

DESCRIPTION **9V overdrive pedal, made in USA. 9v adaptor included**
RRP **£49**

CONTROLS **Log, Boost and Volume**

### Electro-Harmonix EHXtortion JFET Overdrive

DESCRIPTION **JFET overdrive, made in USA**
RRP **£141.73**

CONTROLS **Volume, Treble, Mid, Bass, Pre-gain, Gain. Boost section: Volume, Gain**

CONTACT
**www.ehx.com**

## Like this? Try this...

**Durham Electronics**
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**A different proposition to the Log Overdrive, but with some similarities in the tone department**
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Tight Rock
**Super high quality overdrive pedal with plenty of tonal flexibility if you're looking for an EXTortion alternative**
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**Voodoo Lab**
Sparkle Drive
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RRP **£119**

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# DOD
# Overdrive Preamp 250 & Phasor 201

We all need wallop and wobble, but can a pair of reissues of '70s devices really match up with the trickery of today? Review by **Richard Purvis**

Too young to remember DOD pedals from the first time around? Congratulations, that makes you nu-skool and the perpetual misery, disappointment and bitterness of middle age still lie ahead. Actually, it's not that long since the DOD name disappeared from guitar shop windows, but most stompbox historians would surely agree this US maker's heyday was a good three decades ago. The slogan back then was 'America's pedal', but production had been switched to China by the end of the last century. Now the brand is owned by DigiTech, which is in turn owned by Harman, and someone, somewhere in that hierarchy has decided that it's time for some vintage reissues once again. These new versions of the company's best-loved overdrive and phaser are available for a limited time only, according to the website, so we'll have to wait and see if they lead to a more substantial DOD renaissance.

Both pedals have been updated for modern use but only minimally – most notably with the addition of true bypass and blue 'on' LEDs – and the original enclosure designs have been sprinkled with some metallic sparkle for a fresh but vintage-flavoured look. It doesn't say anywhere on the pedals or the paperwork where they're made, so we had to check with the distributors; well, it's perhaps understandable that DOD should be coy about the continued Chinese involvement in the light of that lapsed slogan.

More important than all that, though, is the name: do we say 'DOD' as in three initials, or 'Dod' as in Ken Dodd, the buck-toothed comedian and inspiration behind the greatest band name ever, Ken Dodd's Dad's Dog's Dead? The

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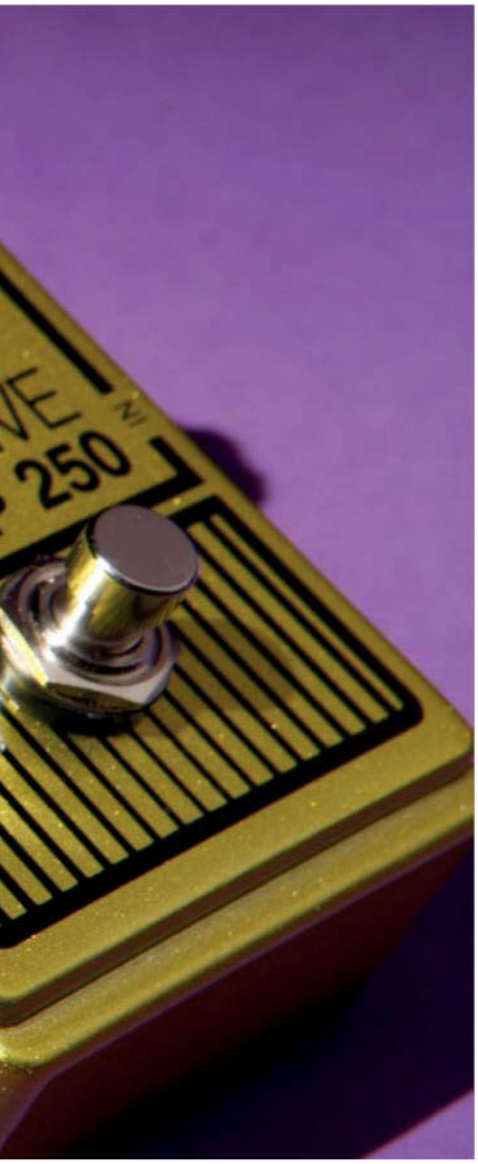

letters are indeed initials – those of David Oreste DiFrancesco, the engineer who co-founded the company in 1974 – so we'd best go with the former.

## Overdrive Preamp 250

Even with the twinkling gold finish that stripey design looks distinctly old-fashioned – it'd go nicely with black leather trousers and a pink headband, but you wouldn't call it embarrassingly '80s in itself. The simplicity of the two-control design is timeless, and the knobs are knobbly enough for on-stage tweaking with the side of a dextrous boot. Gain and output Level are the essentials for just about any overdrive or distortion stomper; what you don't get here is any kind of tone control. There's a standard 9v adapter input at the top, and you have to remove the baseplate to change the battery. It feels light for a metal-cased pedal, but everything has been put together tight and true.

| FINAL SCORE | |
|---|---|
| DOD OVERDRIVE PREAMP 250 | |
| **Build Quality** | **17**/20 |
| **Versatility** | **18**/20 |
| **Sound** | **19**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **18**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **18**/20 |
| TOTAL | **90%** |

## Sounds

We're told the new 250 has more output and headroom, so we'll start our inspection with Gain down to zero and see if there's any undistorted boost on offer. There is: with the Level control at halfway it's just about impossible to tell the 'overdriven' signal from the bypass sound except for a light mist of added hiss, and cranking it up from there just makes things louder – loud enough, at the very top of the dial, to give the input stage of your amp a right old pounding.

Now we'll cool things back down and start winding up the Gain instead. The overdrive comes on almost imperceptibly, at first just roughing up the edges and adding some thickness and compression to single notes, while power chords are smooth and chunky all the way past noon. By now we've stumbled into a playground of vintage rock and pre-grunge metal tones, and it's spectacularly good fun. Lead lines are creamy but snarly, chords are huge with single-coils or humbuckers, and the only thing you might need to do when you're really pushing it – apart from apologising to the neighbours, maybe with flowers – is stick to the bridge pickup to maintain clarity.

On the subject of clarity, the simplicity of this pedal brings two extra advantages: first, it cleans up nicely when you back off on your guitar's volume control; and second, the overall timbre is never too far away from the bypass sound, so it really doesn't need a tone circuit.

## Phasor 201

Unless it bothers you that DOD spells 'phaser' wrong, there's not much to say about the look of this pedal – it's like the other one, but blue. The basic build is the same, but now we're only dealing with only one knob. This may seem like extreme minimalism but it's worked for plenty of other tasty phasers down the years, including the classic MXR Phase 90 and Electro-Harmonix Small Stone – both of which were launched in 1974, DOD's first year of existence.

## Sounds

Starting in the middle of the dial, the 201 offers all the liquid swirliness of a classic phaser and manages to avoid scooping out the core of your guitar's natural voice. It's pretty intense, but it doesn't climb up and down through the sweep as clearly and naturally as you might expect. The first word that comes to mind is 'throbby'... or even 'pumpy', which probably isn't a word either. In fact this is almost more of a Leslie simulator than a phaser, with a strong pulsating effect that you wouldn't want to hear while suffering from seasickness. The range of the Speed control is very conservative: maxing it out makes the effect wibbly fast but not robotically weird, and at the other end of the dial it still goes through the whole cycle in about a second and a half. This one's not going to break the scoreboard for versatility.

As there's nothing else on here to twiddle, that just leaves the question of placement, so we'll to break out the Overdrive Preamp 250 again. Putting the phaser first means the slightly odd dynamics are flattened out by the OD's natural compression, giving a smoother sound; as with many phasers, the frequency extremes can be a bit painful if they're added after the overdrive.

## Verdict

Both of these reissues deserve to pick up new fans as well as cheering up some old ones. The Phasor might not hit the spot for everyone but it makes some bold and distinctively woozy noises, while the 250 is a straightforward yet surprisingly versatile overdrive whose appeal goes way beyond nostalgia.

| FINAL SCORE | |
|---|---|
| DOD PHASOR 201 | |
| **Build Quality** | **17**/20 |
| **Versatility** | **14**/20 |
| **Sound** | **15**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **17**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **17**/20 |
| TOTAL | **80%** |

## FACTFILE

### Overdrive Preamp 250

DESCRIPTION **Overdrive pedal. Made in China**
RRP **£89**

CONTROLS **Gain, Level**

### Phasor 201

DESCRIPTION **Phaser pedal. Made in China**
RRP **£85**

CONTROLS **Speed**

CONTACT **Sound Technology**
**01462 480000**
**www.dod.com**
**soundtech.co.uk**

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**MXR**
Distortion+
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# CRAFTER
# DG-ROSE PLUS

If you fancy a bit of legend in your life, then Crafter Guitars are celebrating their lack of mid-life crisis with a mythically-themed special edition electro-acoustic. Review by **Rick Batey**

Daenerys Stormborne of House Targaryen, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea (to the uninitiated, TV's *Game Of Thrones*' Mother Of Dragons), may have the cities of Astapor and Yunkai in her hand plus a vast army of liberated slaves and a trio of scaly flying flame-throwers, but she probably doesn't have a Crafter 42nd Anniversary Series DG-Rose. Which is a shame, because Dany, being a lady of some class, would probably rather like one.

But we must drag ourselves away from the Seven Kingdoms and back to this one, where it strikes us that while this may be a 42nd year celebration, we don't exactly recall Crafter guitars in the shops in the '70s. The explanation is that although the company was founded in Korea in 1972, for the first 14 years they used the brand name 'Sungeum'. Since shifting to 'Crafter' in 1986 they've moved to larger premises twice and now employ 140 craftspeople to make over 60,000 guitars a year, of which the UK hoovers up about 10,000.

In terms of build, this anniversary special is built on a grand auditorium body, just shy of 16" wide and 4.5" deep, with a cutaway giving easy access to the 21st fret. The scale is a full 25.5", while the nut is slightly wider than standard at 44mm/1.75". We'll get on to decoration in a minute, but the DG-Rose has some go as well as show: the top is solid Engelmann spruce, a species often noted for a soft, open sound and its suitability for fingerpickers, and this example has a super-fine grain and a buttery colour. The back is solid rosewood, divided down the middle by a rosewood/maple backstrip, while the sides are laminated rosewood, slightly more stripy than the back but well-matched in terms of colour (if you prefer the tone of mahogany, by the way, then Crafter also offers the exact same guitar and in that very wood for £110 less, at £689). The body finish is gloss all over, a little thick and plasticky-feeling, and held up against the light we must say that the top looks slightly lumpy and bumpy. ➔

Deep cutaway and a strap button ready installed in the heel

Tuners are smooth and noticeably low-geared

## This grand auditorium model has a solid Engelmann spruce top, a solid rosewood back and laminated rosewood sides

**CRAFTER**
**DG-Rose Plus**

DESCRIPTION **Cutaway grand auditorium electro-acoustic. Made in Korea**
PRICE **£799 inc. luxury gigbag**

BUILD **Solid Engelmann spruce top with solid rosewood back and laminated rosewood sides. Rosewood fingerboard and bridge. Imitation pearl/abalone dragon inlay, purfling and soundhole decoration, cream plastic binding on body and fingerboard; mahogany neck, rosewood headstock facing with decorative inlay. Sealed gold-plated machineheads with amber buttons. LR Baggs Element pickup with LR-T DX preamp with Vol, 4-band EQ with notch filter rotary, tuner, phase reverse**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Gloss body and head facing, satin neck**

SCALE LENGTH
**647mm/25.5"**
NECK WIDTH
**Nut 44mm**
**12th fret 55mm**
DEPTH OF NECK
**First fret 22mm**
**10th fret 24mm**
STRING SPACING
**Nut 37.5mm**
**Bridge 55mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
**12th fret treble 2.0mm**
**12th fret bass 2.3mm**
WEIGHT **2.1kg/4.6lbs**

CONTACT **Sutherland Trading**
**02920 887333**
**www.crafterguitars.uk.com**

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## Like this? Try this...

**PRS**
SE Angelus Custom EA
**Similar in size and Korean origin to the Crafter, with a cutaway and bird inlays, but losing out with a laminated back. A good guitar with unusual bracing and an open sound**
RRP **£979**

**Crafter**
GLXE 3000-RS
**More expensive than the DG-Rose, this grand auditorium keeps the same electronics, drops the elaborate inlays and adds solid rosewood sides**
RRP **£969**

**Yamaha**
FJX-730FC
**Cutaway grand auditorium with solid spruce top and laminated rosewood back and sides, plus the ART pickup with a System 56 preamp with 3-band EQ, sweepable mids and tuner**
RRP **£538**

Flame soundhole inlays set in rosewood match the dragon motif

## The Crafter DG-Rose sounds good and dynamic, with plenty of top-end presence and a hefty kick in the midrange

So to the pearl, which seems most likely to be plastic. The dragon fingerboard inlay stretches from the seventh fret to the 19th and is quite well-executed, with dark-grained faux-abalone for the body, plain white for the head and spine, and a yellower version for the legs and feet. It's matched on the body by a sparkly strip of abalone edge binding, possibly ablam this time, plus six 'flame' motifs set into the wide rosewood band of the soundhole rosette. There are also little abalone 'wing' designs on the bridge, which carries pearl-topped pins. On top of that the whole guitar, minus the headstock, is bound in cream plastic.

The DG-Rose comes stage-ready and complete with a semi-rigid gigbag, which is just the ticket. It has a strap button installed at the heel, while the output jack, endpin and battery sit together on an oval plastic plate. Crafter's LR-T DX preamp is well-equipped, with Volume and Notch rotaries, four bands of EQ, phase reverse, and an output-muting LCD tuner which works well (especially in conjunction with the smooth, low-geared machineheads). It also functions unplugged, while Mode simply changes the E, B, G indicator to 1, 2, 3 and so on.

### Sound

Picking up the DG-Rose, it feels solid and slightly heavy. The neck is a peach, a well-rounded medium C shape with a speedy satin finish, and the slightly wide string spacing at bridge and nut allow plenty of room for fingerpickers. It's been set up nicely, with a 2mm action on the top E at the 12th fret, and no fret buzz; all the fret ends are smooth, and though it perhaps could do with a smidgin of height taken off at the nut, it's very playable as it is. There is an odd sympathetic vibration on the open G which we could not cure by restringing nor by snugging up the tuners and the trussrod; it's possibly a wire routing hiccup which could be easily sorted, but you'd want to see that done pre-sale.

Under gentle fingers or pick the Crafter sounds good, quite dynamic, with plenty of top-end presence and a hefty kick in the midrange which starts to become boxy when you really dig in. It's good for bright strumming, and a thumbpick makes the most of the fractionally weak low end, which suffers slightly with bare fingers alone.

The preamp is hooked up to an LR Baggs Element piezo under the bridge saddle, and the results are excellent; the presence adjusts the sparkle perfectly, the sweepable midrange is a boon and the well-judged bass slider adds a richness that really makes the most of the undersaddle piezo sound.

### Verdict

Although essentially a highly-decorated midrange Crafter and not one of their top quality models, the DG-Rose is a nice-playing guitar which satisfies reasonably well acoustically and does somewhat better plugged in. The 1.75" nut will find favour with fingerpickers and the lavish quantity of pearl does make it stand out from the crowd. If you don't see yourself as the Mother (or Father) of Dragons, Crafter does other grand auditoriums with alternative pearl designs or with plainer looks, and we bet they're fine as well.

The 44mm nut width is nice and spacious

Quick-change battery drawer and separate jack socket and endpin

| FINAL SCORE | |
|---|---|
| CRAFTER DG-ROSE PLUS | |
| **Build Quality** | **16**/20 |
| **Playability** | **18**/20 |
| **Sound** | **16**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **17**/20 |
| **Looks** | **17**/20 |
| TOTAL | **84%** |

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# PETE TURNER

## Marrakech Madagascar

Blending the old-fashioned and the modern with considerable style, Pete Turner's instruments offer a very different sonic flavour to a vintage ampliphonic guitar. Review by **Huw Price**

As a left-handed player, mounting frustration led Pete Turner to start building his own guitars. Before long he applied his mechanical engineering background to resonators, and since then Turner's impeccably modernistic recreations of these archaically-amplified guitars have found their way to players like Mark Knopfler and Luke Potashnick and Paul Sayer from The Temperance Movement.

This guitar's neck is formed from three strips of quartersawn Honduras mahogany capped with a stunning slab fingerboard of the deepest brown ebony. A single abalone snowflake gleams like a jewel at the 12th fret, and the flawlessly-dressed frets shine like polished silver. The sapele binding is nicely figured, contrasting with the vivid grain patterns of the all-solid chocolate brown Madagascar rosewood body.

The open-backed Gotoh tuners with their tortoiseshell buttons look and feel wonderful, but the star of the show has to be the perfect V-profile neck. It seems so right for this guitar and, like the body, it has a wax finish that looks new but feels old. The all-important cone and spider are sourced from the respected US maker Beard, but Turner makes his cone covers, surrounds, bridge covers, string anchors and even the single coil pickups himself.

Madagascar rosewood body is bound in figured sapele

Mahogany neck with a sweet soft vee profile

### The Turner isn't a bluesy, barking steel-body resonator but a far more subtle and pretty-sounding guitar

### Sound

Some types of guitar are so synonymous with specific genres that it's all too easy to approach them with preconceived ideas. The Turner is a case in point. When we tuned to open D, slipped on the slide and attempted to play some blues it didn't exactly disappoint, as given the wooden body and spider bridge we weren't expecting steel guitar levels of bluesy brashness, but we had expected a bit more bark. After thinking about it for a while the penny dropped, and when we took a step back we realised that the Turner is really a far more subtle and pretty-sounding guitar.

Our review example was set up for easy playing with nickel-wound strings. In combination with a scale length of 24.75", it seemed as if the resonator wasn't being driven hard enough. To test the theory, we went back to ➔

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### FACTFILE
**Pete Turner Marrakech**

DESCRIPTION **All solid wood resonator guitar with pickup. Made in the UK**
PRICE **£2300 inc. Hiscox hard case**

BUILD **Solid Madagascar rosewood body with Honduras mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard and peghead overlay, bone nut, Gotoh SE770 open gear tuners, Pete Turner single coil pickup, Beard No.14 spider and Beard cone**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, at no extra charge**
FINISH **Hard wax oil with microfibre wax top coat**

SCALE LENGTH
**628mm/24.75"**
NECK WIDTH
**Nut 44mm**
**12th fret 54mm**
DEPTH OF NECK
**First fret 20mm**
**Ninth fret 25mm**
STRING SPACING
**Nut 38mm**
**Bridge 54mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
**12th fret treble 2mm**
**12th fret bass 2.5mm**
WEIGHT **2.5kg/5.5lb**

CONTACT
**Pete Turner Guitars**
**07976 305675**
**www.peteturnerguitars.com**

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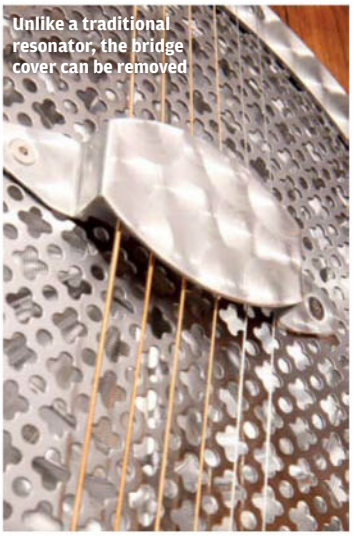
## Like this? Try this...

**Paul Beard**
PBR-D Deluxe
**Assembled and set up in the USA, this guitar has a laminated maple body, ebony fingerboard and features the same cone and bridge found in the Marrakech**
RRP **£875**

**Alan Arnold**
Rezolution
**Another UK luthier making custom ordered wooden bodied resonator guitars with laminated tops and backs, Quarterman cones with biscuit or spider bridges, slotted headstocks and Grover tuners**
RRP **£1495**

**National Reso-Phonic Guitars**
M-2
**Laminated mahogany top and back, solid mahogany sides, 9.5" hand-spun cone, pearloid headstock overlay, mahogany neck, rosewood fretboard, ivoroid binding, maple biscuit bridge, open gear National brand tuners, hardshell case included**
RRP **£1500**


Unlike a traditional resonator, the bridge cover can be removed

Handmade tailpiece with machined finish

Neck width at the nut is a comfy 44mm/1.75"

regular tuning then further up to open E, and the Turner's true voice emerged. The wooden body contributes to the sound by sweetening the metallic presence of the cone with complex midrange harmonics and a warm thump to underpin the snap of the bass notes. With the nickel jazz strings the Turner sounds on the mellow side of bright, and the wiry woodiness is so evocative that it almost transports you back through the decades and across the water.

The bridge cover is a big plus-point. We have played resonator guitars with covers that sit very high; Turner's sits about 1/16" above the wound strings, so it's easy to palm-mute without having your picking hand forced up too close towards the neck. If you prefer, it can even be removed completely.

Resonator cones gradually warm up, and they're highly directional. Play something with the Turner facing forward then play it again with the body tilted upwards, and it almost sounds like a different guitar. Our advice is find a nice corner to play into.

Before changing to acoustic strings, we gave the pickup a workout. The pickup does a fine job of capturing the Turner's tone. It's quite sensitive, with plenty of treble; controls are nonexistent, so you'll have to rely on your amp for tonal colour. Through a clean amp the tone is fairly hi-fi, but with a sound that's much preferable to a piezo system. With a dose of reverb and tremolo it has Cooder-like qualities, but we liked it best through a cranked-up low-power valve amp with the treble rolled back for a huge, honking early urban blues sound.

Roundcore Newtone Michael Messer signature strings gave the Turner extra kick. With the cone driven harder, the wound strings began delivering more of a Jerry Douglas tone and the fatter unwound strings no longer felt underpowered. The tone was louder, brighter and bassier, but the feel was now more in keeping with a traditional resonator. Clean slide playing was now a possibility, but the easy-going noodling nature was less evident.

We couldn't say that we preferred the acoustic strings to the electric set. The Marrakech sounded almost as good through the amp and while the acoustic strings emphasised the woodiness, the electric strings emphasised the metallic qualities. Swapping over merely proved that the Turner is a very versatile and wide-ranging instrument that can adapt to various approaches and styles.

**The Marrakech doesn't back you into a bluesy corner: it's like a regular acoustic that just happens to have a resonator**

Wood-encased single coil pickup is handwound by Turner himself

## Verdict

A metal-bodied resonator of similar quality may have a more eerie tone with a natural reverb that allows ghostly harmonics to linger on, but the Marrakech doesn't back you into a bluesy corner. It's like a regular acoustic that just happens to have a resonator cone, and your usual repertoire will sound fresh and new – and that's always inspiring. The best guitars don't always grab you from the get-go, but by the time the Marrakech had to go back we had most certainly bonded. Aesthetically the elaborate cone cover seems a bit at odds with the art deco restraint of the slotted soundholes and the plain peghead, but other options are in the pipeline, and the sound, workmanship and design get our unequivocal thumbs-up.

**FINAL SCORE**

| PETE TURNER MARRAKECH | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **19**/20 |
| **Playability** | **18**/20 |
| **Sound** | **19**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **17**/20 |
| **Looks** | **19**/20 |
| TOTAL | **92%** |

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# SANDBERG

## California MarloweDK 5-String & Electra TT

Sandberg is delivering the goods with a five-string version of one of its tastiest signature models plus a genuinely fine medium-priced four-string. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

Experience has taught us to anticipate the arrival of new basses from those Sandberg chaps with a beaming smile and high expectation of a large dollop of fun. We first reviewed their wares just over 10 years ago, an active Bullet and more traditional Basic Ken Taylor five-string, so in an anniversary-type manner it's serendipitous to have another pair to review.

Both these Sandbergs have been put together by a small clique of artisans in Braunschweig ('Brunswick') in northern central Germany. Established in 1986, Sandberg's first basses were contemporary through-neck models, pieced together, mosaic-like, from exotic wood multi-laminates, with natural finishes and souped-up electrics coupled to high-powered pickups. In the early '90s they decided to take a more mainstream, traditionally-slanted path, initially via the Ken Taylor model, developed at the instigation of the London-born, Germany-based session ace. Today they still offer up-to-the-minute styles but the most popular models are the California Series, introduced in 2005.

Inspired by Leo Fender's classic template, California Series basses come in a variety of pickup configurations, with a host of personally customisable features at extra cost, four or five strings, and a multitude of traditional finishes. It's this branch of the Sandberg family which provides our review fodder this month, namely an Electra TT, part of Sandberg's new 'outsourced' line priced in the higher reaches of budget territory and, first up, a new five-string version of the signature MarloweDK.

Dulled hardware and sanded-off neck finish

Hardcore ageing indeed, but with a six-bolt neck

The MarloweDK comes with an extra-long 35" scale to ensure this passive bass gets the most out of its B string

### MarloweDK 5-string

If your tuition videos have received over 25 million clicks on YouTube, as is the case with Danish bassist/tutor Thomas Risell, better known as MarloweDK, surely the minimum you deserve is a signature instrument. Risell approached Sandberg looking for an updated version of his 30-year old Jazz Bass. The DK5 adheres to the same principle as the four-string model which debuted in 2012, but this time it comes with an extra-long 35" scale form to ensure that this passive-powered bass gets the most out of its B string.

Undoubtedly, the biggest discussion point and the most eye-catching feature is the finish. Sandberg describes this as 'hardcore ageing', and you can ➔

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### FACTFILE

**CALIFORNIA MARLOWEDK 5**

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Handbuilt in Germany**
PRICE **£1899**

BUILD **European alder body, bolt-on Canadian hard rock maple neck, 22 medium frets, rosewood fingerboard with pearloid block inlays, all hardcore aged. Sandberg Vintage Open Gear tuners and Sandberg Vintage High Mass bridge. Hardcore aged chrome hardware**
ELECTRICS **Passive with two Sandberg Alnico single-coils, two Volumes and one Tone control**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, at no extra cost**
FINISH **All aged colours and all matt finish options**
RANGE OPTIONS **Four-string MarloweDK, £1775**

SCALE LENGTH
**889mm/35"**
NECK WIDTH
**Nut 44mm**
**12th fret 67mm**
DEPTH OF NECK
**First fret 21mm**
**Ninth fret 24mm**
STRING SPACING
**Nut 9.5mm**
**Bridge 18mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
**12th fret treble 2.5mm**
**12th fret bass 3.5mm**
WEIGHT **4.16kg/9.17lbs**

CONTACT **Synergy Distribution**
**0121 270 6485**
**www.synergydistribution.co.uk**

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**Good, all-round working bass, handbuilt in France**
RRP **£2099**

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**Active five-string Jazz Bass, always a very viable option**
RRP **£1858**

**GB**
Spitfire
**Another high-quality belter, this time from Brighton**
RRP **£2300**

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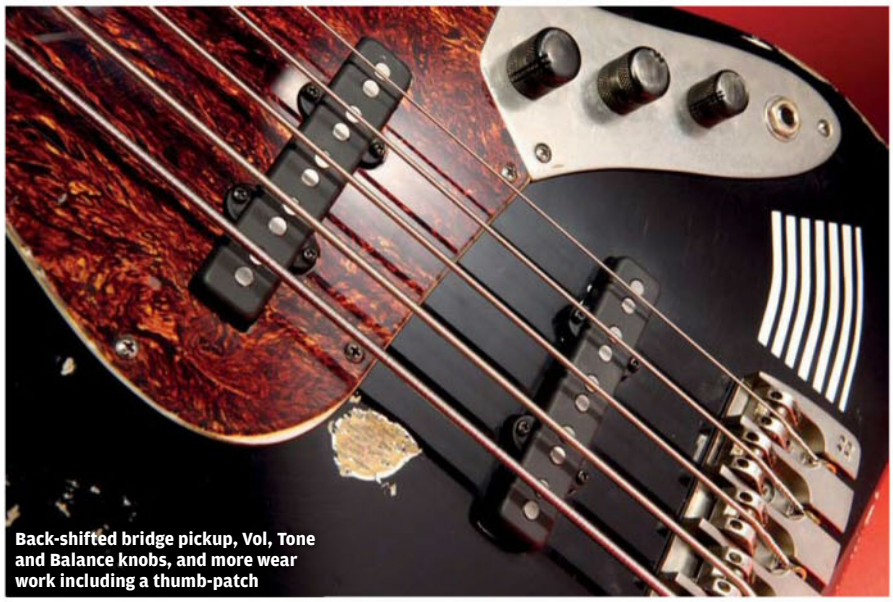


Back-shifted bridge pickup, Vol, Tone and Balance knobs, and more wear work including a thumb-patch

## The MDK is a warm, retro-sounding bass, clean and extremely even, with plenty of practical bottom end

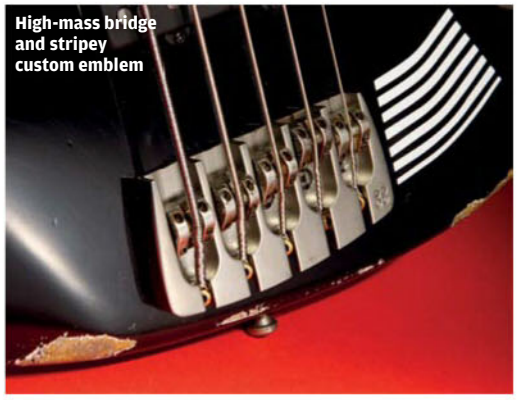
see why – it's what Fender would call a 'heavy relic'. Three of the Sandberg team are involved in the process, sanding bodies and necks, filing and gouging the finish with car keys and sandblasting the hardware, all of which sounds like a lot of fun. Of course, whether it's your cup of tea is down to personal taste, but if you're looking for an example of ageing done to a good standard, then look no further.

Being part of Sandberg's California Series, the DK5 takes its cue from the Fender Jazz Bass, complete with off-set body and generous forearm chamfer and tummy carve, all hewn from European alder. Retained by six bolts, the Canadian hard rock maple neck is comfortable and playable and topped off by Sandberg's take on the familiar headstock. Tuners are chrome Sandberg Vintage Open Gear units, all dulled by the ageing process. One variance, however, from regulation California models is the neck, which is about 2mm narrower at the nut, putting the strings roughly 0.5mm closer together. There are 22 medium-gauge nickel frets seated in a dark rosewood fingerboard with pearloid block inlays.

The other Marlowe-ism relates to pickup positioning. The DK5 has two Sandberg alnico single-coils but on this model the rear unit is sited 11mm closer to the bridge, which is about 3mm closer than on a Jazz Bass. Presumably this is intended to tighten up the sound, but it may also increase nasal honk.

Control-wise we get Volume, Balance and Master Tone, which is slightly different to the best-known twin-pickup passive configuration. Other noteworthy features include a classy tortoiseshell pickguard, a convincingly aged Sandberg Vintage High Mass bridge and some curious embossing – presumably a kind of signature adornment – on the lower bout.

Balance-wise, the DK5 has a tendency to neck-dive when played in the sitting position, but it's easily calmed by resting the forearm on the top edge. On a strap, it's stability personified.



High-mass bridge and stripey custom emblem

| FINAL SCORE | |
|---|---|
| MARLOWEDK 5-STRING | |
| **Build Quality** | **19** /20 |
| **Playability** | **17** /20 |
| **Sound** | **18** /20 |
| **Value for money** | **17** /20 |
| **Vibe** | **17** /20 |
| TOTAL | **88%** |

### Sounds

In twin pickup mode the DK5 sounds clean and extremely even; very 'classic single-coil', but with plenty of practical bottom end. The altered pickup positioning has helped produce a noticeably warmer, more retro-sounding bass, and the B string sounds sweetly focused. The mids are smoother and mildly scooped, less aggressively attacky but without any of the excessive nasality suggested by the closer proximity of bridge pickup to bridge. The highs are fairly conservative, although you still get a gratifyingly slicing snap out of the G string if you lay into it. With the DK5, you get out what you put in; a heavier playing velocity inducing a gratifying snarl on low strings and a fine punch in the midrange, moving the sound seamlessly from pop and soul to rockier material. Back the Tone control off to halfway and the tone begins to lose its edge, which amounts to a standard adjustment you might need to make if you have a cabinet with over-active horn syndrome, and just before full cut puts you in old school blues and Motown soul territory.

The bridge pickup alone is plenty loud enough and less high-middly – it's well-defined, but the barking edge has less of a throaty rasp. Overall there's a tiny bit more bottom end, and backing off the tone control claws back even more, blunting the cutting edge in the process. With the neck pickup soloed the tone is earthier with a threatening bottom end, duller, darker mids and clean highs with a compressed feel to their snappy attack – it's just what you'd expect, with a high quality sheen. Chop back the tone knob and this bass moves inexorably towards reggae, blues or trad roots music, while just before full cut is warm and woolly, making you want to give the DK5 a big hug.

### Electra TT

The Electra range is Sandberg's attempt to offer a high-quality, no-fuss budget model, and they've chosen to outsource various components to other companies in Japan, Korea, USA and Germany. These are delivered to Braunschweig for assembly, where Sandberg employs the cunning computer-controlled Plek station for guaranteed tip-top set-ups, a process often reserved for more expensive models.

There's no faux-ageing here,but the high gloss crème-coated basswood body is cut from the same cloth as the Marlowe, offset, sleek and sexy, with all the same comfort contours and a

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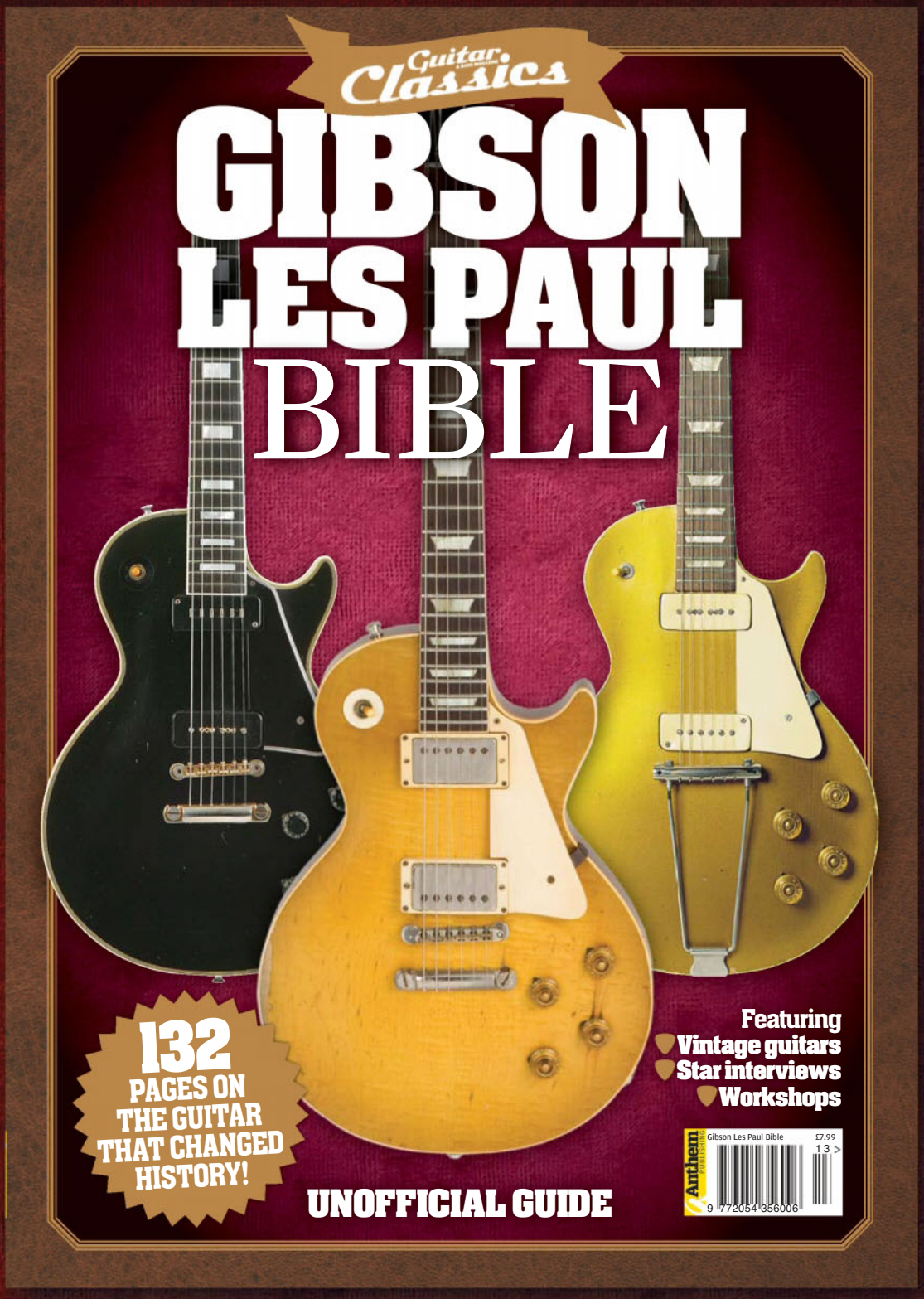


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## FACTFILE
### ELECTRA TT

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Assembled in Germany**
PRICE **£654**

BUILD **Basswood body, bolt-on Canadian hard rock maple neck with 22 medium nickel frets, rosewood fingerboard. Sandberg Open Gear tuners and Sandberg High Mass bridge. Chrome hardware**
ELECTRICS **Active with Sandberg Designed preamp and two Sandberg Designed single coils with Alnico V magnets. Volume (pull for passive mode) and Balance controls and a two-band EQ in stack knob formation**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, at no extra cost**
FINISH **Black or crème high gloss only**
RANGE OPTIONS **Electra Vs £599, Electra M £699, both four-string only**

SCALE LENGTH
**864mm/34"**
NECK WIDTH
**Nut 38mm**
**12th fret 55mm**
DEPTH OF NECK
**First fret 18mm**
**Ninth fret 24mm**
STRING SPACING
**Nut 10mm**
**Bridge 19.5mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
**12th fret treble 3mm**
**12th fret bass 4mm**
WEIGHT **4.06kg/8.93lbs**

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Millennium AC BXP4
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**Vintage**
V964
**Very, very MM-styled bass with a single humbucker and a three-band EQ**
RRP **£319**

Master volume with pull switch for passive, Balance knob, and active EQ on a stack knob

# The Electra TT is possibly the best medium-budget active bass we've come across in the last couple of years

regal tortoiseshell scratchplate. Six bolts are used to secured a neck that's also hewn from Canadian hard rock maple, and it's just as comfortable and fun to play as any Sandberg bass. The barbed arrowhead headstock carries a shiny chrome string tree and four Sandberg Open Gear tuners. The nut is a synthetic self-lubricating type, and a dot-free rosewood fingerboard rents its ground to 22 medium nickel frets, with white dot markers lining the top edge. The strings' pilgrimage concludes at a chunky Sandberg High Mass bridge.

Electras are kitted out with two Sandberg Designed single coil slabs with alnico V magnets, hooked up to a Sandberg Designed two-band active preamp, although tugging on the knurled chrome Volume knob brings in an optional passive mode. The remaining controls are Balance and a stack-knob EQ dial; bass is controlled by the outer ring, treble by the inner. You change the 9v battery necessary to power all of this via a quick-release compartment around the back.

The Electra is similar to the DK5 in balance, although less headstock-heavy when seated and unsupported. It, too, is assuaged by an appropriate forearm and well-balanced on a strap.

Neck width at the nut is the regulation Jazz-style 38mm/1.5"

## Sounds

While the look and feel of the Electra lift it above its asking price, the initial twin pickup sound heads it back the other way: the midrange is bright and highs sparkle, but the bottom end is lacking. We reached for the bass dial, and the transformation was cause for some celebration. All of a sudden the Electra has some real stature, plus a full and even midrange and plenty of controlled top. With added treble EQ full boost veers towards hi-fi snap, but just short of this is more naturally aggressive-sounding and most bodaciously excellent for slapping.

An injection of bass EQ is required with separate pickups, producing a fatter and richer version of the P-Bass tone from the neck and a bridge sound that's still a little bass-light. Moderate Treble boosts are excellent for overall clarity, but while big hikes add a good, nasty growl to the bridge, the neck pickup takes on a metallic sheen that's a little clicky and clanky.

## Verdict

Within the context of familiar styling Sandberg very much follow their own path, making classy instruments that are both practical and reliable. This is very much the case with both the DK5 and the Electra. The DK provides that old-school bass sound with the addition of a worthy B-string; it's a top-notch traditional-sounding passive bass, especially if you're a fan of aged finishes. The Electra TT starts off lacking bottom end, but a little judicial EQ work unearths a tonal quality which massively belies its asking price. Its lively top end is gratifyingly fresh and open with that clarity coming from quality high-mids, while the bottom end is thudding and full of impact. The Electra is an excellent introduction to Sandberg, and it's possibly the best medium-budget active bass we've come across in the last couple of years.

## FINAL SCORE

| ELECTRA TT | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **19**/20 |
| **Playability** | **16**/20 |
| **Sound** | **18**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **18**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **18**/20 |
| TOTAL | **89%** |

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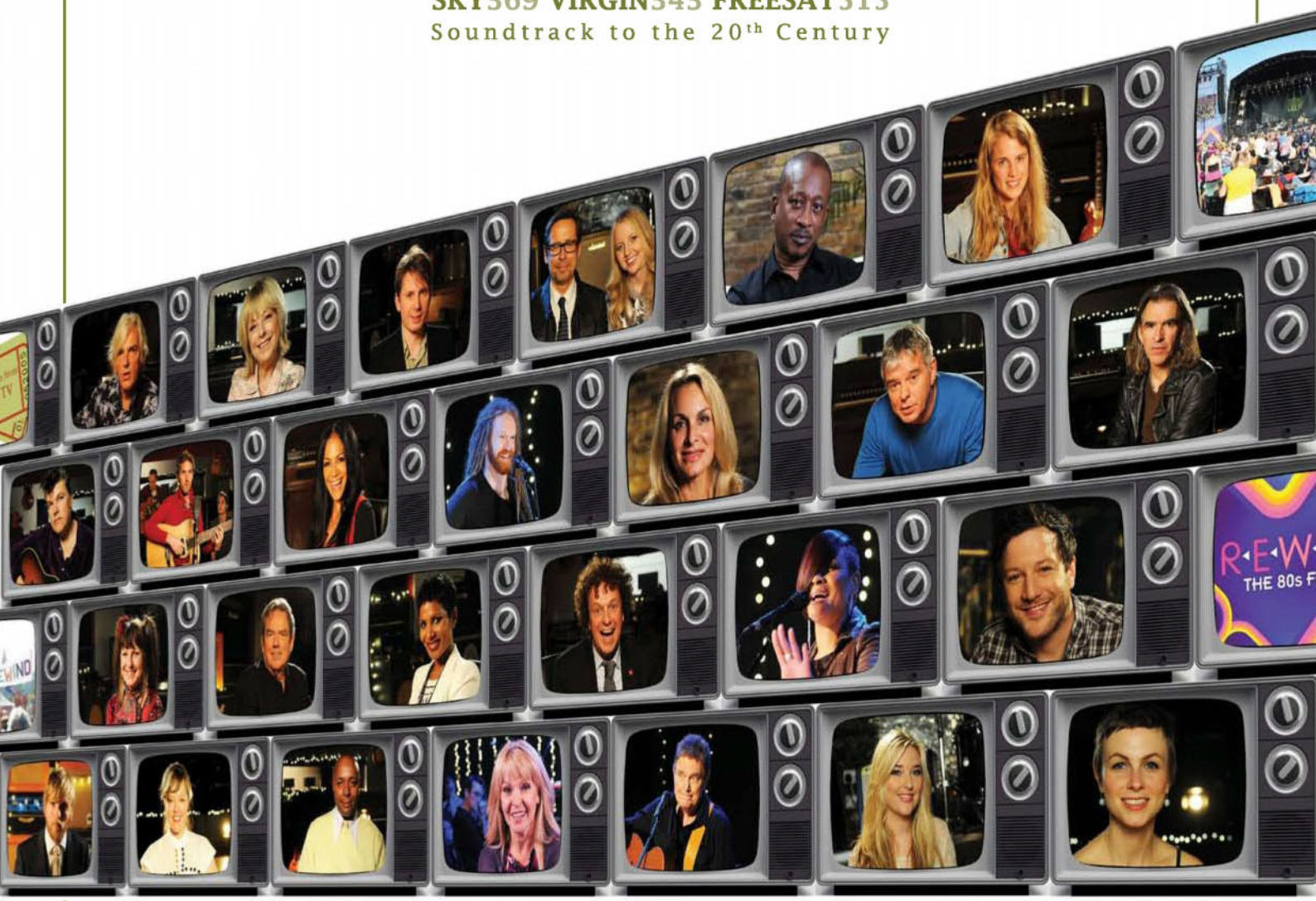

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# STRYMON
## OB.1 Optical Compressor

Strymon are well-known for their guitar delays and reverb, but how does their compressor stack up in a tricky bass situation? Review by **Gareth Morgan**

Serious FX-ophiles amongst you may have come across Damage Control pedals whilst idling sleuthing the web. They first appeared in 2004, so you may own one; your pedalboard would know about it if you did, as they were seriously high quality units, about the size of a small car. Co-founders Gregg Stock, Pete Celi and Dave Fruehling realised they had a good concept, but when by 2009 the pedals hadn't really lit major commercial fires, they kept DC as a parent company and formed Strymon, a new line of high-spec, largely handwired wares designed to be fit more within the boundaries of acceptable stompbox girth. Strymon's fare is mainly guitar-oriented but one offering we bassists can get down with is their optical compressor, the OB.1.

Sounding very much like the surname of a character from *Star Wars*, the OB.1 comes in the form of an orange aluminium anodised box, weighing 392.8g/13.85oz and chunky but reasonably-sized at 101mm wide by 63mm high and 112mm deep (including controls and sockets). Battery power is an option, but it comes supplied with a 9v plug. As well as the usual On/Bypass stomp switch, there are three main controls; the two larger knobs are Output, which controls the overall volume, and Comp, which sets the compressor's threshold – more transparent and natural-sounding to the left side, and more intense and squashed to the right.

As well as compression, the OB.1 offers a clean boost function via the smaller rotary knob and some switches. The mini toggle switch offers three EQ settings – Flat, Mid and Treble – each a different starting point for your boosting endeavours, while the Boost Level control regulates the amount of boost, although we can't tell you how much in dB. You can turn this on or off via the Boost stomp switch. There are also internal DIP switches, accessed via the back plate, for varying the mid and treble frequency to be boosted.

### Sounds

A good starting point with compressors is to set the output (or equivalent) to match your basic level and then tweak the compression control. With Comp spun to the left igniting the OB.1 is like spring-cleaning your tone, and although you should note this involves a slight diminution of bass end, you can compensate by boosting your bass EQ a notch higher than normal. The left-hand offerings are sparkly and beautifully transparent with excellent sustain, and the main body of your held note takes noticeably longer meet its inevitable fate. It's darker at around 10 o'clock, and the punchy low mids are delivered with a barking aggression. On the right, the stunted squashy character kicks in around 2 o'clock, with the highs graduating rapidly from losing a little bite to sounding downright choked.

The boost function only works when compression is engaged, and with the toggle switch in the Flat position, it's wonderfully clean. To simply boost your inputted signal, roll the Comp dial fully left and – internal DIP switch settings notwithstanding – with the EQ toggle at Treble you get a slightly less weighty and expectedly brighter starting point, but Mid doesn't beget a usable bass tone. Still, it might be useful if you want a 'special occasion' sound or just a level hike for soloing.

### Verdict

Whilst we haven't been able to check out tonal possibilities relating to resetting the DIP switches, anything they offer can only improve what is already a very good unit. True, anywhere past minimum compression level does have a negative effect on the bass end but it's easy to learn by how much you need to compensate with EQ. On radical settings the squashed '80s sound is readily available and the more subtle settings are gorgeously transparent. The price is on the high side, but this is a very good pedal.

**FINAL SCORE**

| STRYMON OB.1 OPTICAL COMPRESSOR | |
|---|---|
| **Build Quality** | **18**/20 |
| **Usability** | **19**/20 |
| **Sound** | **18**/20 |
| **Value for money** | **16**/20 |
| **Vibe** | **17**/20 |
| TOTAL | **88%** |

### FACTFILE
**Strymon OB.1 Optical Compressor**

DESCRIPTION **Guitar or bass guitar optical compressor pedal. Made in USA**
RRP **£199**

CONTROLS **Output, Boost Level and Comp controls, mini toggle switch for three selectable EQ boost shapes (Treble, Mid, Flat), On/Bypass and Normal/Boost switches. True bypass, battery or 9v p/s (included) operation**

DIMENSIONS
**101mm x 63mm x 112mm**
WEIGHT **0.383kg/0.84lbs**
FINISH **Anodised orange**

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# NEVER LEFT BEHIND

As a lad **Phil Harris** saw the left-hand fork in the road and turned right instead, but vintage left-hookers are very much in demand

Although it might well be a lot better nowadays than it used to be, left-handed guitar players are still not catered for in anything like the same way as right-handed players. As someone who writes left-handed, I probably would have gone down the left-handed guitar route if my elder brother hadn't warned me off, telling me I'd have a lot more instruments to choose from if I learned to play left-handed.

I'm sure many others got the same advice and heeded it, as during my playing days I only ever played with two musicians who played left-handed. The first one was, Stevie Stewart, in a kids' band we had called Wade In Man (great name, huh?). He started off on a left-handed Watkins Rapier 44, as Charlie Watkins' factory was only just down the road from us in south London. Stevie was so determined to play left-handed that he later turned up at my house with a left-handed Rosewood Telecaster he'd bought on hire purchase. He'd waited six months to get it and he was the talk of the town, actual Fender guitars being rare enough on their own at this point, never mind left-handed versions.

The second lefty I played with was an Irish bass player who played a left-handed bass strung upside down, so the thick E string was at the bottom. When he was learning to play Joe couldn't get hold of a left-handed instrument, so he flipped over a right-handed one. When he finally got hold of a left-handed bass he found he was much more comfortable with the original stringing. You'll often find that left-handed players, like Hendrix, are more adept at the unconventional.

**If you do have a great vintage left-handed guitar, the laws of supply and demand dictate that it'll probably be worth more than a right-handed one**

Those looking to get hold of vintage left-handed guitars are competing with two markets: left-handed players, and collectors who more often than not actually play right-handed... and you can include me in the latter category. My advice to anyone interested in obtaining a vintage left-handed guitar – or any good left-handed instrument – is to seize any opportunity that arises, as it doesn't come around that often. The famous American left-handed guitar shop Southpaw were at the Arlington show in the early '80s and blew everyone's mind. They had about 40 great instruments on show and it looked amazing, because most people had never seen that many left-handed instruments before. For the most part, you're going to struggle if you're looking for something specific. If you ring me up and ask to get hold of a left-handed '63 Strat, you'll have more chance of getting the Pope to dig your garden than I will have of finding one quickly. If you do have a great vintage left-handed instrument, however, you're quids in. The laws of supply and demand dictate that it will probably be worth far more than its right-handed equivalent. Finally, some good news for lefties!

## 1988 MARTIN D-28/12

**Just to highlight the problems you can have finding left-handed instruments, I tried for 18 months to get hold of something like this. Eventually, I called it a day and ordered this direct from the Martin factory. I really wanted rosewood back and sides, so it was either a 28 or a 35 for me. I waited six months for it, but it was worth the wait... so much so that after I bought this one, I never bothered trying to find another left-handed 12-string for the hire company.**

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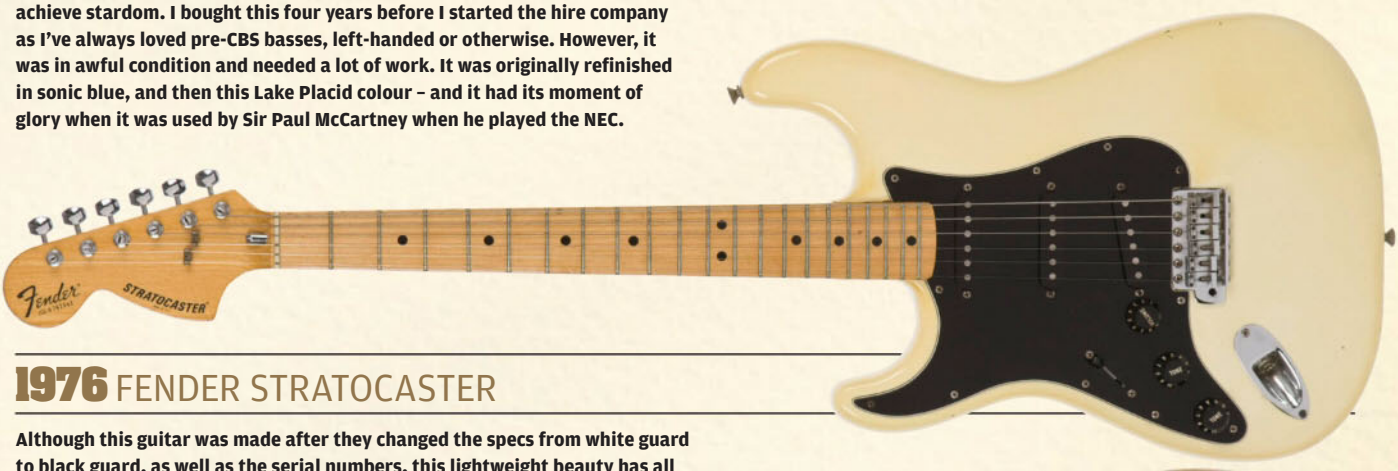
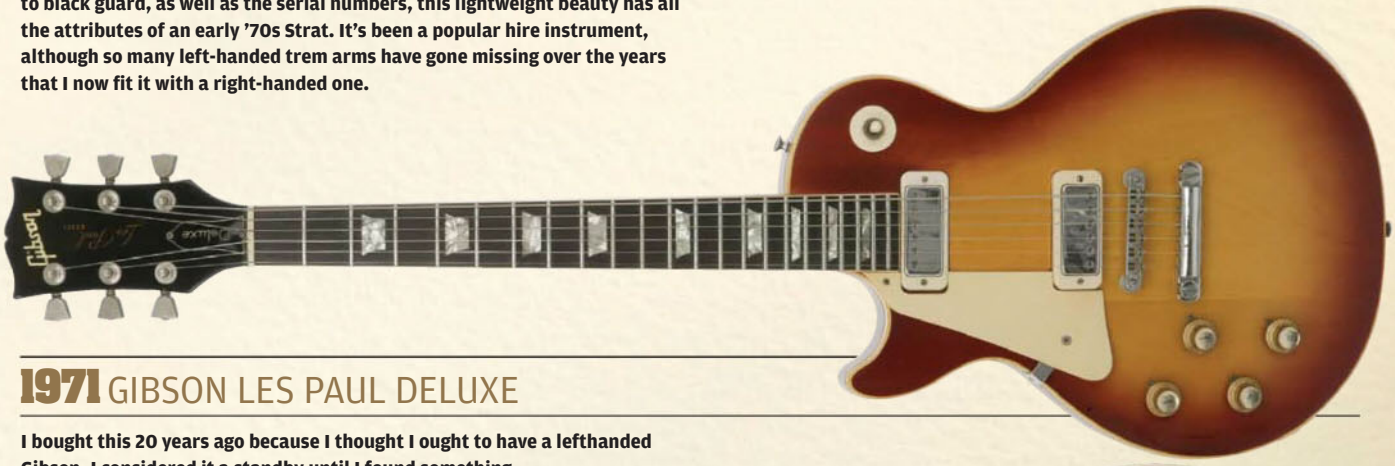
## 1963 FENDER PRECISION

**This is a story of how an instrument can be rescued from the scrapheap and achieve stardom. I bought this four years before I started the hire company as I've always loved pre-CBS basses, left-handed or otherwise. However, it was in awful condition and needed a lot of work. It was originally refinished in sonic blue, and then this Lake Placid colour – and it had its moment of glory when it was used by Sir Paul McCartney when he played the NEC.**



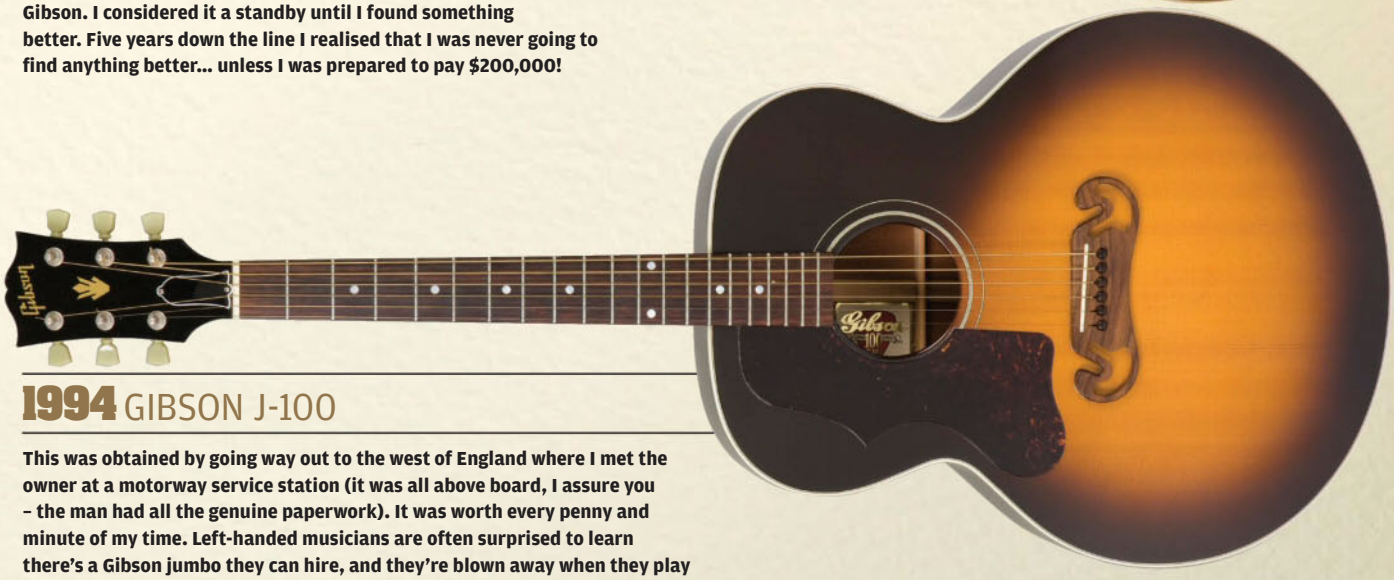

## 1976 FENDER STRATOCASTER

**Although this guitar was made after they changed the specs from white guard to black guard, as well as the serial numbers, this lightweight beauty has all the attributes of an early '70s Strat. It's been a popular hire instrument, although so many left-handed trem arms have gone missing over the years that I now fit it with a right-handed one.**




## 1971 GIBSON LES PAUL DELUXE

**I bought this 20 years ago because I thought I ought to have a lefthanded Gibson. I considered it a standby until I found something better. Five years down the line I realised that I was never going to find anything better... unless I was prepared to pay $200,000!**




## 1994 GIBSON J-100

**This was obtained by going way out to the west of England where I met the owner at a motorway service station (it was all above board, I assure you – the man had all the genuine paperwork). It was worth every penny and minute of my time. Left-handed musicians are often surprised to learn there's a Gibson jumbo they can hire, and they're blown away when they play it. Thunder's Luke Morley is a big fan of this guitar, and he's not the only one.**

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# *Bass* ODYSSEY

Lovingly assembled by a puppet of indeterminate species, this month's *Private Collection* is merely a 'greatest hits' selection of one of the coolest, largest and most impressive groups of basses we've seen in a long while. **Lars Mullen** has the story

Not all our *Private Collection* subjects fancy the idea of having their names spread far and wide across the musoverse. These are people of mystery, weaving their way through a secret network of contacts in search of the items of their dreams. This month's subject is just such a cloaked figure: a guitarist and bassist since the '70s, he's the author of a popular some-guitar-but-mostly-bass blog who for the sake of anonymity has chosen to assume a nom de plectrum... Flat Eric.

Flat Eric started out playing guitar in the early '70s but moved to electric bass and was soon thumping away on a low-budget model which, to his surprise, actually sounded rather good – and 'alternative' is still the key word to his approach to instrument acquisition. Spurning, mostly, the golden age of American twang and thunder, he prefers to wander in the realms of the '70s and '80s, and though he has room for a few guitars his overwhelming theme is bass, bass and bass.

'I do have a few things from the big names, but over the years I've been well rewarded by reaching out and not being afraid to try something that's a bit odd or unusual,' Eric explains. 'I'm particularly interested in basses made in the Far East in the '70s, a period when companies such as Aria and Ibanez had to a long way to prove that they could take on and beat the big names from the USA for quality and playability. After all, it would be a dull world if we drove the same car, wore the same clothes and ate the same cereal!

'I can't argue that Strats, Teles, Les Pauls and Precisions aren't classic icons, but what fascinates me is that there's always one around the corner that doesn't have a big name on the headstock but plays wonderfully well and sounds amazing – and it doesn't have to cost a fortune. For me it's all about how the instrument performs, although I do like to get hold of clean examples too. It's a balance, I suppose, between looks and performance.

A Hondo Professional and a CMI Artist

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Ibanez RB920 and a blueburst Ibanez RB950

I can relate to the old British TV comedy-drama series *Lovejoy*, where this antiques dealer supposedly had almost supernatural powers when it came to recognising a good purchase. I don't have psychic powers, but I can sniff out a cool bass!

'I'm certainly not embarrassed to gig with any one of these. To me, they're alive with energy, as opposed to some modern ones, which I think can feel a little lifeless or cold to the touch. All my basses respond well, and none have any noticeable dead spots; play a low F note and you get the balls, and an octave G gives you brightness and power. Plus, they didn't cost me a fortune.'

Let's begin with a couple of straight replicas. 'The fretted maple-neck sunburst one is a Hondo Professional. I saw it on eBay and the *Lovejoy* gut reaction kicked in. I fitted a set of Grant-branded strings which had been in the packet for way over 25 years, took it to a band rehearsal, and was completely astounded – I really thought someone had turned my amp up. It has that great sound that you hear on so many records.

'Next to it is a fretless CMI Artist bass with an almost identical story. I actually bought this one after the Hondo to see if the '70s value-for-money theme continued, and it really did. I'm definitely not the world's best fretless player, but I can make it sound pretty good.

'Early Ibanez basses also do it for me, and these next two are from the early RB Road Star Series, a RB920 with a single J6 pickup, finished in sunburst over a birdseye maple top, and a two-pickup blueburst RB950, also from the '80s, with a double-octave neck. Both have alder bodies and the famed Ibanez Tri-Sound wiring which offers series/parallel and single coil options. I find these neck profiles are perfect. I'm not fussed about the rosewood verses maple fingerboard thing... in fact I can't hear the difference, and I would like to meet someone who can tell the difference! To me, it's all in the fingers. We buy all the special gear and effects to use on stage, but if you are mic'ed up, you're in the hands of the sound guy anyway.

'Here's another pair of Ibanez basses, but active – a fretless RS940 on the left and an RS924 on the right. Both of these are loud, even played acoustically. I can get pretty much all the sounds I need via the passive/active switches, and I love the Super P4 and Super J4 pickups for their sound and for the adjustable polepieces. I don't like a dead sound, or one that's too bright, but with these I can tinker and tailor my own tone and balance the output.

'Here's a pair of heavy Ibanez basses in more ways than one, an active ST980 eight-string bass and a passive four-string ST824. The active Studio Series models were obviously designed for studio use, but they're also great for live work. Both have walnut and mahogany bodies and three-ply maple necks, plus the Tuned Response feature with steel bars inside the double-octave necks to eliminate dead spots. This was a real golden era for Ibanez. They sound like pianos, and with the Tri-Sound wiring and their great playability I reckon they can compete with some modern high-end boutique basses.

'On that note, I wanted to just slot in this Ibanez six-string SB70 guitar. This one's been played within an inch of its life. Allegedly it was a limited run of a few hundred models, and it seems to be quite rare. It's a straightforward no-frills guitar, and a fantastic player. When I get my moments of fantasy, I'd like to think I was the British blues player, Davey Knowles... I wish!

'We're jumping the gun here as we'll get on to Peaveys in a bit, but next to the SB70 is a Peavey T-60 six-string. It's definitely my desert island guitar. The see-through red finish, maple board, black scratchplate and hardware all look amazing. I remember going to a demo on the T-60 when it first came out and I was confused with the switching and pickup permutations, which are the same as on the basses. I managed to get hold of one ↦

Eight-string Ibanez ST980 and a ST824

Ibanez RS940 and RS924

Ibanez SB70 and Peavey T-60 guitars

Left, an Ibanez Musician; right, an Ibanez Artist 2626B

Ibanez Roadster RB650 and a Parkinson custom

## 'The Electra X620 MPC Outlaw bass was available with any of 11 different effects modules, including Tank Tone and Frog Nose'

for a while to noodle with it and all became clear, and I was fascinated by this guitar.

'But back to basses! I've gigged with this '80s Ibanez Musician a lot. It's got passive/active, series/parallel, a three-band EQ – but when I find a sound I'm happy with, I'm inclined to just leave it alone. It's not a criticism, but I know a lot of players who spend ages talking about how a bass is wired up like an aircraft. I'm less interested in that aspect, and more about the sound it makes.

'The next one's quite rare. It's an Ibanez Artist 2626B with a stained ash body with a German carve. The three-post bridge is a great design – you can string it with the ball-ends at the bridge or through the body. The pickups are a fair way apart, so the neck gives a big thuddy sound and the bridge is the opposite. Each pickup has a mini on/off switch, which can be deadly live, so I leave them both on. I have to float my arm as there's no resting place for the thumb, so I can be a little inaccurate on occasions!

'I have two of these mid-'80s Ibanez Roadster RB650 basses. This white one also has the Super P4 and Super J4 pickups and a maple fingerboard. It's a simple set up, but you really can alternate between the pickups and blend them in and out. This would be a fantastic bass to record with.

'I don't have much information about this white Parkinson Bass, which was built in Leigh, Lancashire. It's based on a Precision but tonally leans towards an angry Rickenbacker... it's very alive. It's handbuilt and a little rough around the edges, but it's a definite case of sound over cosmetics.

'I think Ibanez basses are just so "right". Here's a RS900 Roadster with a stained ash body, maple neck and fingerboard, single volume control and a two-band EQ... it's a rocker of a bass. One of my all-time heroes, Phil Lynott, played this model, so if it was good enough for him... say no more. I still love Phil's playing, he made it look so easy. That bass intro to *Dancing In The Moonlight* using a phase shifter was so haunting.

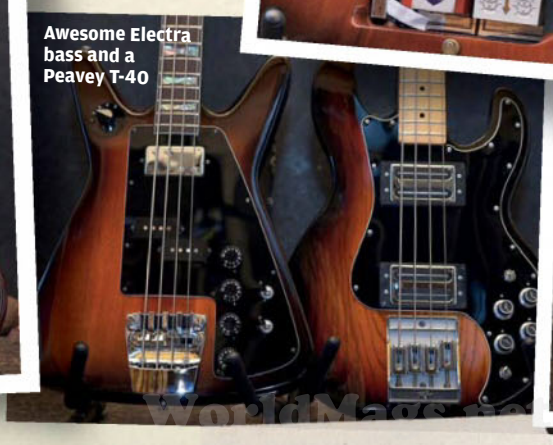
'Yamaha have always been an iconic name in the industry, but I do prefer the older instruments. This SB500 Super Bass is more or less Yamaha's version of a Jazz. According to the paperwork it was made on March 3 1978 and the 54th instrument produced on that day, so the production line was really on fire – but they still managed to maintain consistency and quality. I've heard it said by a lot of people that they've never played a bad Yamaha.

'Talking of Phil Lynott and his phaser, I can pretty much get that same sound from this Electra X620 MPC Outlaw bass. It has interchangeable electronic modules with 11 different effects available, including Tank Tone and Frog Nose! On this late '70s model we have the Phase Shifter and a Treble And Bass Expander. The Tone Spectrum Circuitry gives five different pickup permutations, and with the mahogany through-neck, large tailpiece and Magnaflux pickups, the sustain is huge. I love the butterfly fingerboard inlays, too. Chris Squire from Yes famously altered his, and I believe he still uses it. I looked for ages for one of these... there are very few on this side of the Atlantic.'

Eric is known amongst fans of the Peavey T-40 bass as one of the keenest collectors. He calls it an 'iconic classic' and has even become acquainted via the internet with Chip Todd, the 'T' in T-40 and the man who, along with Hartley Peavey, ↔

L-R: Ibanez RS900 and a Yamaha SB500

The Electra's effects modules revealed


Awesome Electra bass and a Peavey T-40

And yet more Peavey T-40s...

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Peavey Foundation fretless and a '70s Guild B-301

The glow of maple: Ricky replicas by Greco and Aria

designed the model in the first place. 'I've chosen just three to show you,' Eric grins. 'The sunburst one next to the Electra we just talked about plus the natural-finished one are both from the '80s and have the "blade" pickups, while the lighter "tan burst" is from the late '70s and has the warmer earlier "toaster" style pickups.

'T-40 basses are built like Mack trucks. The wiring varies the humbucker/single coil options: for example, when the tone controls are up full, the pickups are single coil; back them off, and you can hear them change to humbucker mode. I mentioned to Chip that the natural one, made from heavy North American ash, is the loudest T-40 I've ever come across, and he said that the pickups were wound in such a way that some were more powerful than others.

'Here's another Peavey bass, a fretless Foundation. It's an early one from '87, US-built, with the same black line around the headstock as on the T series. The Super Ferrite pickups are brilliant – a bit like a Jazz Bass on steroids. It's a no-frills workhorse with a really nice narrow neck. I also prefer the lined fretless fingerboard – otherwise for me it's a bit of a challenge.

'Guild also have a great bass pedigree. I first played one of these B-301 models back in the '70s. They were frowned upon because of the body shape, but they're well respected now. I had a hankering for one, and as soon as I got it, it was like travelling back through the decades. It's great in every department – a simple "plug in and get on with it" bass. It's my only bass with flatwounds, Rotosounds in fact, but even with those it's got rightness, punch and power.

'Here's a pair that echo in quite good detail the 4000 series Rickenbacker basses – a mono version, a Greco PMB, and a stereo Aria. Not the real thing, of course, but they do have plenty of that character. The Greco PMB arrived from Australia; the owner used it in a Beatles tribute band. The "PMB" actually stands for "Paul McCartney Bass"!

'Aria's Elite Series basses from the '80s play and sound so good, and I personally think they still look exciting today. They were a bit of a milestone in bass design. The one I've chosen to show has a wonderful grain pattern on the ash body wings, and it also highlights the five-piece through neck and the MB-II pickups. This is a bass that really does benefit the multi-tonewood construction. These basses are so well-balanced, they feel part of you... they almost play themselves.

'I'm also a big fan of the Ovation's Magnum Series basses... another underrated model, and quite unusual even by today's standards. I have two here to show you – a see-through red stereo Magnum 1, and a Magnum III with a mono-only output and more defined double cutaway body in a greyburst finish.

'The build is very robust, but that large humbucker-sized neck pickup isn't as monstrous as it looks – rather the opposite, in fact, as it has four separate, adjustable single-coil polepieces. The Magnum 1 is in top condition so it wasn't a cheap buy, but it's a great player, and the large one-piece pickup surround – or the "corral", as one of my USA friends calls it! – runs all the way from neck to bridge, making an ideal thumbrest.

'I also have a pair of Ovation's solidbodied six-string guitars I wanted to include here – an active Breadwinner with the textured LyraChord finish in black, and a single cutaway Viper with a pair of single coils. Both have the same tuxedo greyburst finish, but the Breadwinner has a slightly "rough to the touch" textured sheen, while the ➔➔

Ovation Magnum 1 bass, plus Ovation Breadwinner and Ovation Viper guitars

Ovation Magnum 111 and an Aria Elite

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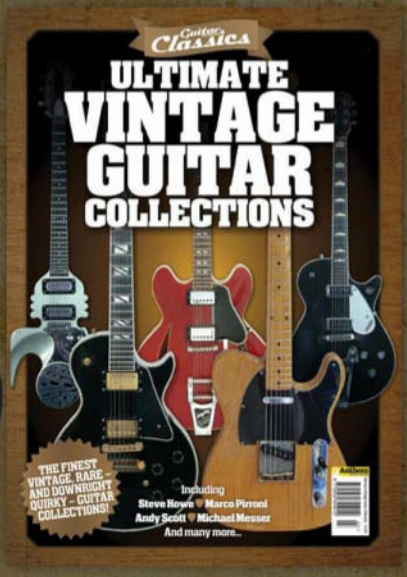


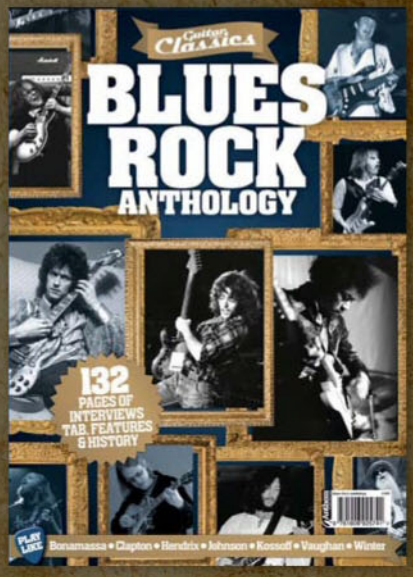


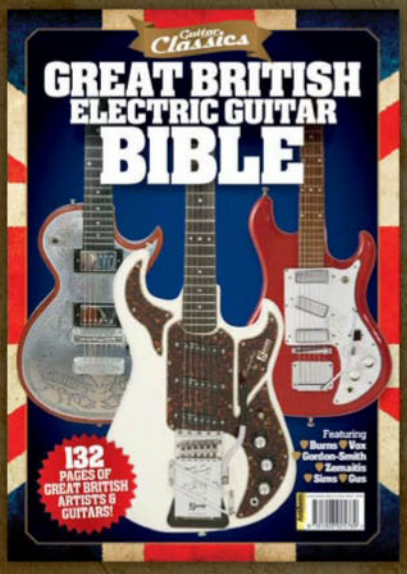


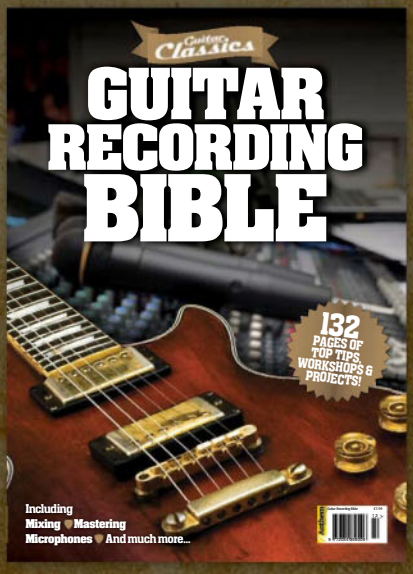


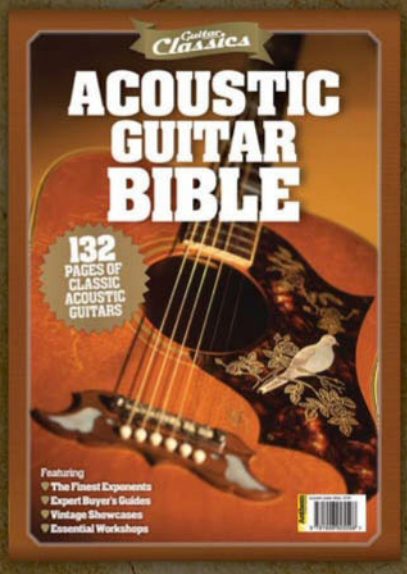


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An Attila Balogh and a Greco GOB 11 750

Viper has a satin finish. I seem to recall reading that the Breadwinner was one of the first commercial active six-string guitars, and it has since become very collectable. It took me ages to find this one in this particular colour. It can be hard to date some of the early Ovation models, as the serial numbering tends to be a bit ambiguous.

'This mid-'70s Attila Balogh Odyssey Bass was made on Granville Island, Vancouver, Canada. It's one of my gigging favourites – a much-played, much-loved bass that's been my first choice for a long time now. If I had to grab one bass and run, this would be it. It has it all... balance, power and tone. The DiMarzio pickups have a punch that would remove kidney stones at 10 paces, in either series/parallel or out of phase, and with quality tonewoods like the ebony board and maple through neck, it's no wonder these have become high on collectors' lists.

'I'm thinking now that if I had to run, I'd also have to grab this next one. It's a single-pickup through-neck Greco GOB II 750. It took a while to find this one as they seem to be quite rare these days, but it's another exceptional bass with a double octave design, and with the same pickup that you'd find on the original Ibanez Blazer.'

Eric also has an eye for a pointy body... or three. 'I've put these next few together as the body shapes are rather similar,' he explains. 'This first one is a '76 Ibanez 2495B Destroyer, and as far as I know it only ever appeared in a catalogue from that year. It's one of the rarest Ibanez basses, and quite sought-after by collectors. It's a bit of a headstock-diver, but I can put up with that! There's something about this one that makes me go all Dusty Hill from ZZ Top.

L-R: Ibanez 2495B Destroyer, a Ray Cooper custom and a Gibson RD Artist Bass

'The one in the middle is a medium-scale Ray Cooper custom bass, built in 1977. Ray is still based in the UK and building guitars. It arrived in a pretty grubby state, but I really enjoyed sprucing it up. It's loaded with DiMarzio J-type pickups and wired to Ray's own active circuitry. I'm not a slap player, but the small cavity in the top is ideal if you want to go into Mark King territory.

'Also in this group is an Gibson RD Artist bass. I was one of the few players I knew who really liked the design when it came out in the '70s, and I still do. The maple fingerboard is a little out of character for Gibson. I believe the Who's John Entwistle had a hand with the design, but didn't really follow it up. The circuitry by Moog is sonically amazing – the circuit boards almost take up the full length of the lower bout. Adam Clayton of U2 gets a really great sound from his. The case has "Dizzy Bitch" written on it... after some research, I found out that they were a sleaze-rock band from that period.'

Two Jazz Basses – a block-marker '72 and a Fender Japan reissue

Big brands aren't banned from Eric's collection by any means, and a couple of Fender Jazz Basses fit in quite happily. 'On the left is a 1972, and on the right is a Japanese '62 reissue – another good example of an East-West pairing,' he says. 'I must admit that I do love a Jazz Bass – the necks are so slim and fast and comfortable. It seemed correct to have a real vintage model, but the reissue does a pretty good authentic job as well.'

Eric's passion for the unusual also holds up for British makers of the 1970s. 'The UK has always had a reputation for producing some of the finest luthiers,' he points out. 'These include Peter Cook, who did a lot of work for British rock bands in the '70s, including John Entwistle. He operated from Peter Cook's Guitar World in Hanwell, West London. He often said that Entwistle had "Noah's Ark syndrome', and by that he meant that if he saw a cool bass, he'd want another one exactly the same as the first! I can relate to that and believe I have the same delightful problem!

'I have several of Peter's instruments, including a pair of Axis, a bass and a six-string guitar. They were both built in the early '80s, both have the same body shape, and they're a "reverse match" in terms of the colour of the timbers. Peter recalls that he only produced eight of each model. I know where some others are in the world, but to my knowledge this is the only pair in a collection on the planet. The Axis wiring was developed by a guy who worked for the BBC, and it was detailed in a book about guitar electronics. The sounds are quite stunning. Both are a delight to play, and I get a real buzz from playing the bass live.

'Also from the UK are these two Status Graphite models built from woven carbon fibre and the finest tonewoods. Status are ↔

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## 'The Jaydee twin-neck was built in 1978 for Fez, the bassist from Cryer. When he saw it again, he was speechless'

Peter Cook Firebird Twin, a Jaydee Gemini 4/8 bass, and a candid shot of the proud collector

renowned for their flagship headless designs, but these – a passive Status Shark bass and an active Status Groove, both from the 1990s – were offered in a mid-priced form with headstocks. Thanks to the carbon fibre construction, they're totally lacking in any dead spots. There are some very innovative design touches here, like the indexed pots, the tapered neck profiles, and some of the best fret work I've ever seen. They also came with lockable bridge systems.

'Ironically, I do have a headless bass – it's just not a Status! It's an '80s Gordy, built by Gordon Whittam, a great builder and one of the founders of Gordon Smith. He left them to start his own brand. It doffs its cap to Status and was an expensive bass back then – about two grand in present-day money. It wasn't built down to a price but up to a specific quality, with a lot of tonal variation.

'Alongside the Gordy is a Wilkes Classic four-string active custom bass, built for a customer who had been to Doug Wilkes' workshop in the Midlands and handpicked all the exotic tonewoods that included Brazilian mahogany, wenge, maple and purpleheart. The customer was a mature university student and needed all the money he could get, so he had to sell it – and it's now happily living in my collection.

'The Kent Armstrong pickups bring out the best of this bass; a fine choice, I must say. This is a very organic-feeling model... a bit like Doug's workshop, which is always knee-deep in sawdust!'

Lastly, Eric has a cool story to end our walk through some outstanding guitars and basses. 'Here are two more Peter Cook electric guitars, all in one – a six-string and a 12-string doubleneck, making it an 18-string! It's a mid-'70s Firebird Twin. He made just two of these: this one in the 12/6 neck configuration, and a 6/12 model for Del Bromham from Stray, a '70s UK rock band. Both have Peter's own pickups and banjo tuners on the six-string headstock. Apart from all the custom models he made for named artists, he only built around 50 production models and all are now very rare. Like the Axis models, you can tell this Firebird Twin was put together with feeling, and it's a great nod to Gibson.

'I thought I would finish with this Jaydee Gemini twin neck 4/8 string bass, a totally unique one-off. It was built by John Diggins in 1978 and designed by Richard 'Fez' Ferriday, the bassist in Cryer, a band that didn't quite make the big time. I showed it to Fez, who hadn't seen it for over 30 years; he had thought it was gone forever. When he saw it he was totally speechless, and caressed the strings almost in a daze! The choice of tonewoods and inlays, right down to the wooden pickup covers, were all his own ideas.

'This bass really belongs at home with him, and I've decided to let go of ownership... and the smile on his face is going to say it all. I've experienced so many guitars and basses and have met so many nice people over the years, and for me, handing this bass over to Fez will be the epitome of real guitar collecting.'

**For more on Flat Eric's instruments visit flatericbassandguitar.blogspot.co.uk**

Matching pair of Peter Cook Axis customs

Two 1990s Status basses, a Shark (left) and a Groove

Left, a Wilkes Classic bass; right, a custom Gordy headless bass

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# BUYING GUITARS FOR INVESTMENT

This month Sid Bishop takes a look at two contrasting lines: Gibson's ever-popular SG series, followed by the strange and magical world of resonator guitars

The SG series of guitars, with their near-symmetrical twin-horned design and distinctive chamfered lightweight bodies, replaced the single-cutaway Les Paul series in 1961, primarily due to flagging sales of the first generation Les Pauls, but also the desire of the Gibson company to go in a new and different direction with their entire solid electric guitar range. They introduced an SG Junior with a single P90 pickup, a Special, bearing two P90s, the Standard with two humbuckers, and the Custom with three humbuckers, blinged up with an ebony fretboard and all gold hardware.

That's the official line-up, but I have seen two early '60s Customs with just two humbuckers; Gibson have also issued a recent short run of this version, as well as continuing production of the more numerous three pickup model. The Custom was initially made only in white, though I remember encountering one original and a very early black example – possibly a factory special order, as this specific colour option has never appeared in any catalogue. The other three models (plus the EB0, EB3 and EB6 basses) were only available in cherry, though in the fullness of time custom colours became available, including pelham blue, antique white, and others.

All these guitars were initially launched as 'Les Paul' models. The Les Paul name was applied in the form of a gold decal on the headstock (on the Juniors and Specials), engraved on the truss rod cover on the Standard, and engraved on the small plastic plate between the end of the neck and the rhythm pickup on the Custom. It's no secret that Les Paul himself never warmed to Gibson's 1961 retake on the established single-cutaway model, and demanded that his name be removed from them, and the very last 'Les Paul' SGs were shipped in early 1963. All of these earlier SGs are very desirable,

**Left, a Les Paul/SG Standard with vibrato from 1961; centre, an SG Custom, also a 1961; and right, a 1962 SG Junior**

**The twin-horned SG range replaced the flagging Les Paul single-cutaways in 1961, with Gibson going in a new and entirely different direction**

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especially the first run Standards fitted with the (virtually useless) side-action vibrolas, though they will never come anywhere close to the values of the single cutaway sunbursts.

In 1966 the SG range was given a facelift, and from that year featured a 'full-face' pickguard rather than the half pickguards used previously. The pickups were mounted direct into this plate rather than in plastic surrounds as before, and the Juniors lost their 'dogear' covers.

Neck breaks are quite common on all SGs, and should be closely looked out for, as any such damage will inevitably reduce the value of a guitar. In fact they are probably more common on SGs than most other Gibson models. It's not just headstock breaks, either; necks breaking away from bodies, especially on the first-generation 'longer neck' models, is by no means unusual. Necks are fixed to the bodies by means of a simple glued tenon joint, and by the time a hole is routed out for a neck pickup not very much of the joint remains. You will notice than you can wiggle the neck quite significantly on any of these SGs. Best not try it too enthusiastically.

In the years since there have been many variations on the SG theme, including a twin-neck, available from 1963 to 1968, and again from 1974 to the present. These are most often seen in 6/12 or 6/bass configurations, but there are others. In the Elvis Presley movie *Spinout*, Elvis is featured 'playing' a guitar and six-string bass twin neck. I am informed that this instrument currently resides in the Graceland museum. I've also seen one guitar/mandolin version.

1970 saw the introduction of 'front-loaded' SGs, and by that I mean that the electrics were pre-assembled on to an escutcheon plate which screwed on the front of the body. This was another result of Norlin's numerous attempts to cut production costs. The relevant models included the SG100 and SG200 (effectively Melody Maker replacements), the SG1 and SG2, SG DeLuxe, and SG Professional. These can be found at reasonably low prices, mainly because they're fairly horrible, especially in that rather nasty walnut finish much used at the time, but buy them if you like them, and at the end of the day they are real Gibsons which do play well and sound quite reasonable. The four original models, however, are the ones that have become most established in the public consciousness. If buying mainly for investment, stick to those, and avoid the quirky varieties such as the later Supremes, SG3s, Diablos or the dreadful Zoot Suit.

The SG has become a firm favourite with a wide variety of players, and despite the fact that they've been around for over 50 years, are still selling in significant quantities. Gibson continue to unveil yet more variations, including several 'artist tribute' models, like the Angus Young, Jeff Tweedy, Gary Rossington, Derek Trucks, Kirk Douglas and the Frank Zappa 'Roxy'. Gibson also recently released their first SG Standard 12-string.

**Left to right: a 1968 SG Standard, a 1968 SG Special with P90s, and a recent Gibson Angus Young signature, which aims to be a 1961 reissue**

**In 1966 the SG range was given a facelift, and from that year featured 'full face' pickguards rather than the half pickguards used previously**

## Resonator guitars

Resonator guitars only exist at all due to the necessity to make guitars louder in a pre-electric age. Prior to the invention of an electromagnetic guitar pickup there were a few solutions to this issue, some more successful than others. Several makers, most notably Maccaferri, had experimented with acoustic horns mounted inside a guitar's body, exiting where the conventional soundhole was. These were often formed from papier-mache or resin, and borrowed the basic principle from the large amplifying horn commonly seen on wind-up gramophones of the day. Sadly, this didn't work especially well.

Another, and as it turned out more successful, answer was to mount an inverted aluminium cone in the belly of a guitar body with the bridge mounted on it, almost like a speaker in reverse. The vibration of the strings resting on the bridge would cause the cone to resonate and project the sound outward; at least, that was the theory. The company who marketed these instruments used the brand name National. There was also a now legendary National Tricone model ↦

which utilised three smaller cones. An alternative approach was to mount the bridge on an aluminium frame (known as a 'spider') suspended over an outward-facing cone, fixed in a 'bowl' fashion, and these guitars were marketed under the brand name Dobro, named after the Dopyera Brothers who, along with the assistance of inventor George Beauchamp, had come up with the whole idea in the first place.

The very first resonator guitars appeared in 1927. They became much used by Delta blues musicians, and traditional folk, bluegrass and Appalachian guitarists. Due to their distinctive and unique tone they remain popular to this day, despite the eventual appearance of electric guitars in the mid-'30s. In a classic touch of cross-pollination it was the Rickenbacker company who manufactured the metal bodies and aluminium cones for both the National and Dobro brands. Beauchamp went on to develop the first magnetic pickup fitted to Rickenbacker lap steels in the mid-'30s, which of course made possible the wealth of guitars we enjoy today.

Initially these 'Dobros', being aimed principally at the popular Hawaiian music scene of the day, were made with thick square necks, the intention being that they would be laid flat on the lap. Some blues musicians played in this way too, but a desire quickly emerged for a conventional guitar neck version and these entered production around 1928.

Most of the early guitars had metal bodies, generally nickel-plated or chrome-plated steel, though wood bodies became popular too, including the legendary Dobro Hound Dog. Many of the metal-bodied instruments were highly distinctive, having engraved or acid-etched decorative patterns. Examples with rare designs are much sought after by collectors today, and indeed most vintage resonator guitars, especially pre-war examples, can fetch serious money.

The decades-long and colourful history of the National and Dobro companies (and Regal, who made the wood bodies) is very convoluted, including a number of financial difficulties and even family disputes, but to cut a long story short National was resurrected as National Reso-Phonic Guitars in the late '80s, while Dobro were ultimately purchased in 1993 by Gibson, who continue the production of resonator guitars under the Epiphone banner,.

Several other companies have produced resonator guitars, including Gretsch, Dean, Simatone and Ozark amongst many others, and most continue to do so. Both metal and wood versions are popular and plentiful these days, and I've even noted one current maker utilising carbon fibre. There are also tenor guitar, 12-string guitar, mandolin, and even bass versions. There have been electric semi-acoustic resonators produced from time to time, principally by Mosrite, Valco and present-day National. I saw Leslie West use one of these a little while ago and a player of that stature is certain to drive up interest amongst players and collectors. Resonator guitars, then, range from rare original America-made examples at high prices to modern versions, often made in the Far East, at more reasonable prices. There are dedicated dealers for such things that you may wish to seek out. It's a bit of a specialised market, but they do sell consistently well, and remain popular across several genres.

Photos (2):Courtesey of Acoustic Guitars: The Illustrated Encyclopedia

**Above, left to right: an early National Duolian that used to belong to Rory Gallagher; a top-line Style 4 National Tricone from 1931; and a wood-body Dobro dating from 1935**

**The first resonator guitars appeared in 1927 and due to their tone they remain popular today, despite the arrival of electrics in the mid-'30s**

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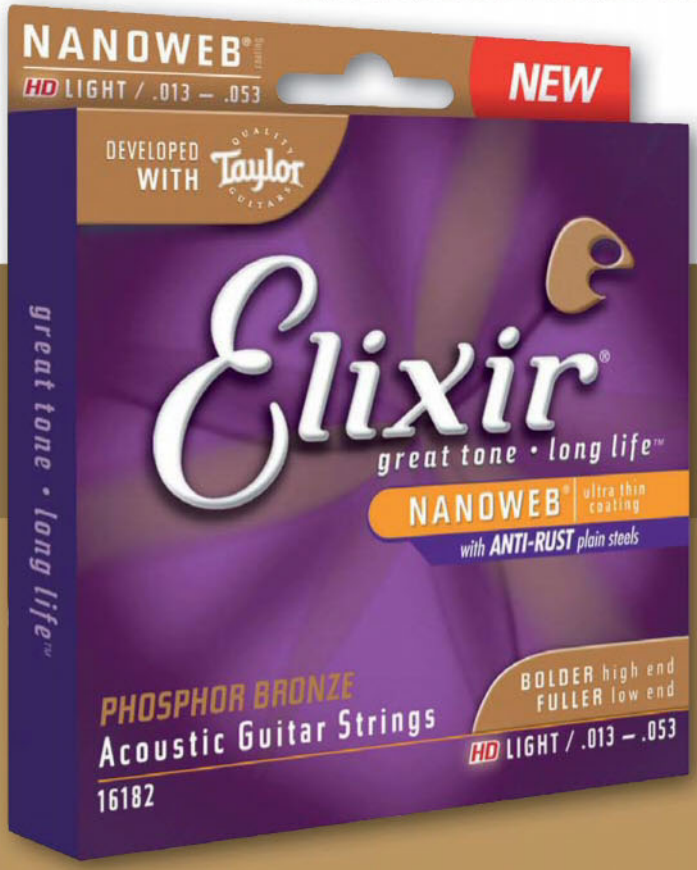


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# Time To Shine

After last issue's intro to the mysteries of prog guitar, we look at the different approaches of Steve Hackett, plus Steve Howe, Alex Lifeson and Francis Dunnery

Last time we investigated some of the rhythmic devices used by progressive rock guitarists to colour their kaleidoscopic soundscapes. One thing you may have noticed is that it's just a little difficult to pin down what it is that makes a prog rock rhythm part. If anything, the real answer lies in the adaptability and versatility of the players; anything from country to the avant-garde seems to be fair game. We also talked a little about the classical influences, especially in the realms of arrangement. Another factor is their willingness to experiment coupled with a desire not to dominate the band with their guitar antics. After all, if you've got someone like Rick Wakeman playing keyboards, any attempt to show off is liable to end in disaster.

One of the most melodic guitarists of prog's '70s heyday was Steve Hackett of Genesis. Over a series of albums he developed not only a distinctive sound, but an original approach to his solo parts. Instead of aimless widdling, these solos were often extended melodies.

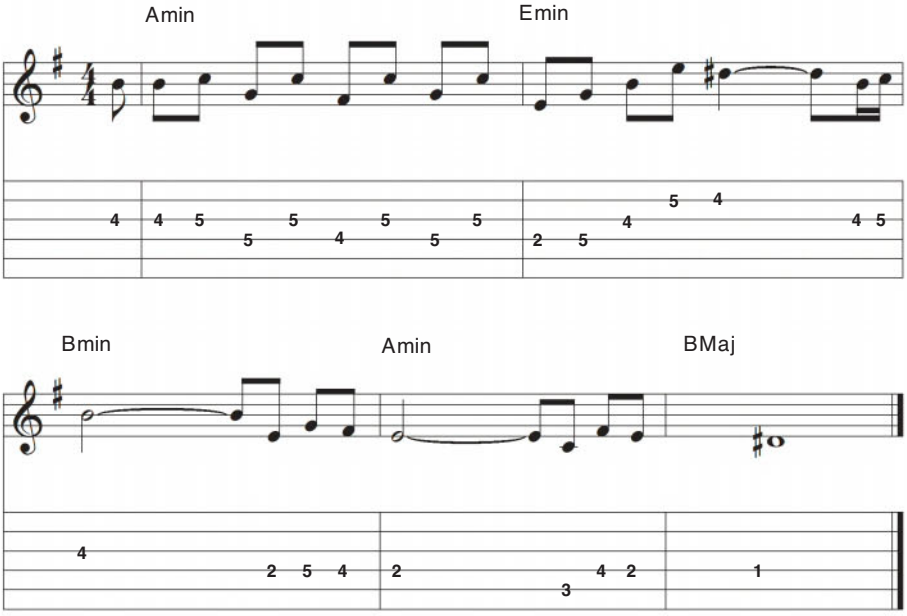
## 1 MAGICAL MOTIF

4/4 TIME

**This is a similar idea to a motif found in the Genesis song *Firth Of Fifth* during the almost two-minute guitar 'solo', though again 'melody' is a more appropriate description. Note the chordal movement, and the way in which Hackett uses the E harmonic minor scale to suggest a B major chord, which fails to come until the end, when it's everyone back to the E minor. Also pay attention to the use of arpeggios and of a technique known as 'pedal-point', a rather baroque ornament where one note is repeated in the middle of a moving melody line... just like Randy Rhoads did 10 years later.**

**To manage a solo of this length players like Hackett would, as we discovered last time, use motifs whereby they would continually return to a particular theme, re-stating it and occasionally reworking it. This is a very classical technique – referring of course to the general genre, not the specific period of what is often termed 'serious' music. Check out Mozart's *The Magic Flute*; this contains a number of motifs which continually surface, particularly a rhythmic chord movement with an underlying masonic significance. Alternatively, think 'Morse Code' in Barrington Pheloung's *Inspector Morse Theme*. Apparently no mean guitar player...**

**It's also notable that the rhythms are straight-simple eighth notes, and there is no finger vibrato at all. This solo was written as an integral part of the piece, and these techniques, along with the smooth, compressed sound which Hackett used, all help the listener to concentrate purely on the melody played, not on the technique or the instrument employed. It's also worth a listen to hear the continual guitar/keyboards interplay... but more about that some other time. The suggested tempo here is roughly 96bpm.**

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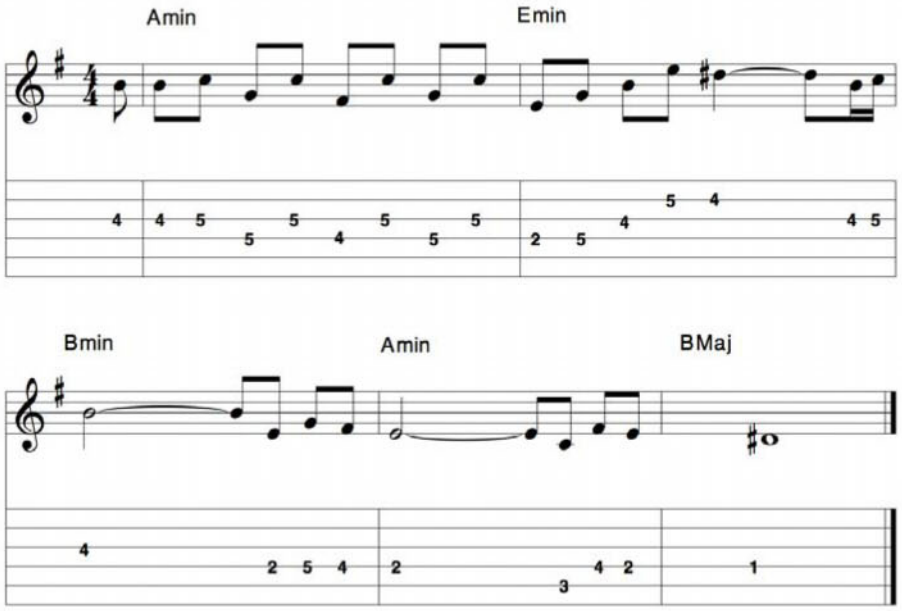
## 2 OPEN COUNTRY

4/4 TIME

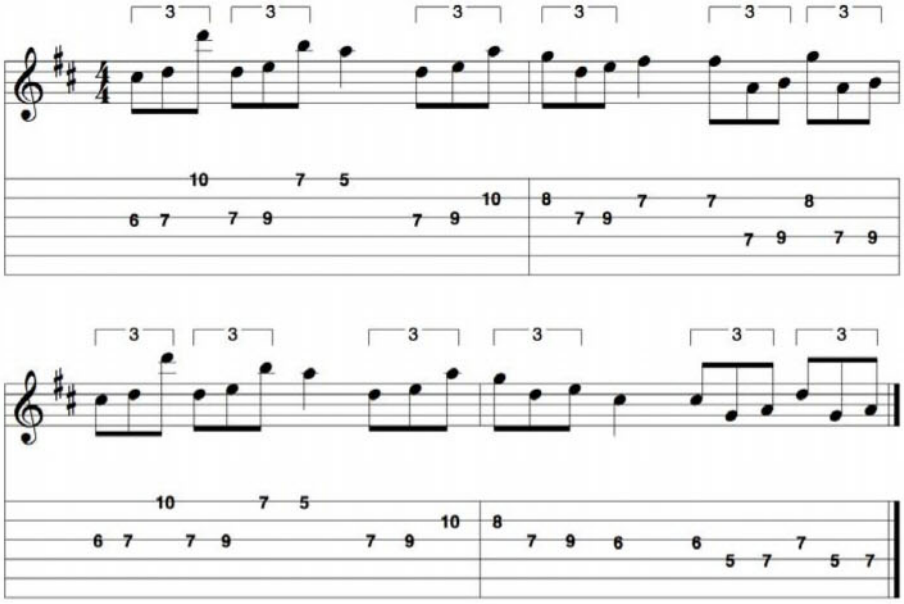
**Here's a different approach. Steve Howe of Yes was heavily influenced by country, blues and jazz, and often took a more traditional guitarist's role within a tune. This is an example of the way he might take a rhythm part and transform it into a small melodic motif which would, again, repeat throughout the tune in different registers and often on different instruments. Note how each phrase is more pentatonically-based than Hackett's modal approach. Howe would also use more specifically 'guitar' techniques in a phrase like this, slipping in slides and playing the occasional bend to aid dynamic control. Whereas Hackett tended to look at the overall picture, Howe played more specifically guitaristic parts. Note how the harmony is simple, and how it is more major-based, a sure sign of being influenced by country music, compared to Hackett's more minor-key excursions using exotic scales. Suggested tempo for the exercise is 144bpm.**




## 3 THE BITER BIT

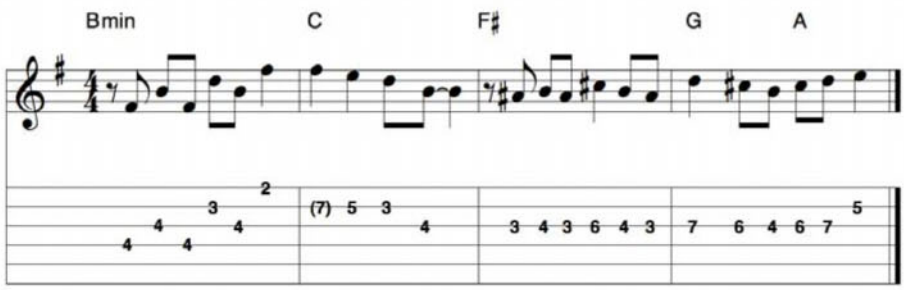
4/4 TIME

**This third exercise a more modern version of the progressive rock theme. This is a melodic motif of the kind played by Francis Dunnery of It Bites, and this part would have been played in tandem with the keyboard player. Note how Dunnery takes the riff and manipulates it, changing a note here and there for emphasis; 15 years after the first two examples, the concept of melodic motifs was still going strong. The more modern influence shows in the fusionistic, almost Mahavishnu-style use of wider intervals, an example of one of the set of influences which have changed the face of prog rock. Do recall, however, that the whole avant-garde intervallic approach littered King Crimson's tunes. These days, it is dominated by much heavier bands such as Dream Theater, who like to show off more. Play this exercise at around 126bpm.**



## 4 LIFE IS LIFESON

4/4 TIME

**This fourth and final exercise shows you one way in which a player like Alex Lifeson of Rush might use a chord sequence to create a melodic part. He'd probably let the notes ring all over the place and added a second guitar harmony in the studio, too. Check out how the melody follows the chords. Suggested tempo for this exercise is 126bpm.**

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# Finger Food

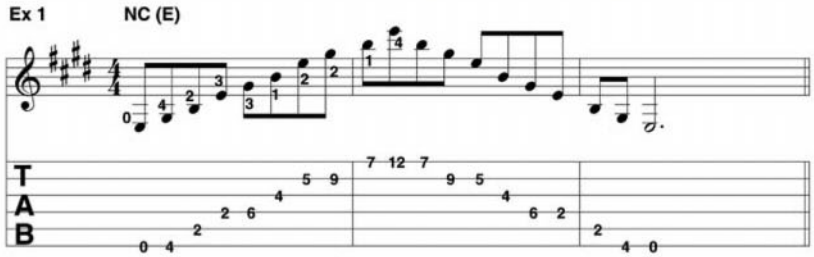
These major scale arpeggios will carry you all over the fingerboard. Ready? Let's go...

An arpeggio is the first, third and fifth notes of a scale played consecutively – normally with the octave at the top – and over one, two, three or more octaves. Arpeggios move from one string to another faster than scales, so they're more of a technical challenge. This month, the fingering is indicated beside the notes on the ascending part of the arpeggio – simply use the same fingering on the way down – and '0' means open string. Only one note should sound at a time, so lift your fingers to prevent overlap. A left-hand shift is required when the same finger frets two consecutive notes on the same string; aim for smoothness with no hint of staccato on the first note and no drop in tempo. If playing with a pick, use alternate picking; if plucking with the fingers, start with thumb/index/middle then ring finger, then repeat index/middle/ring finger until the top note, which is plucked with the ring finger. Coming down, use a ring/middle/index pattern and your thumb on the last note.

## 1 E MAJOR ARPEGGIO

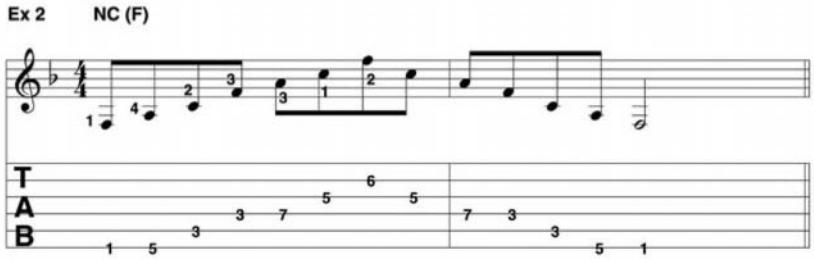
4/4 TIME

**This three-octave E major arpeggio can be played on any type of guitar – electric, acoustic, classical, take your pick. Unlike last month's scales which were all fingered one finger per fret, the top of this arpeggio requires stretching out of position to reach the highest note; leave the first finger on the seventh fret whilst fretting the note at the 12th fret.**



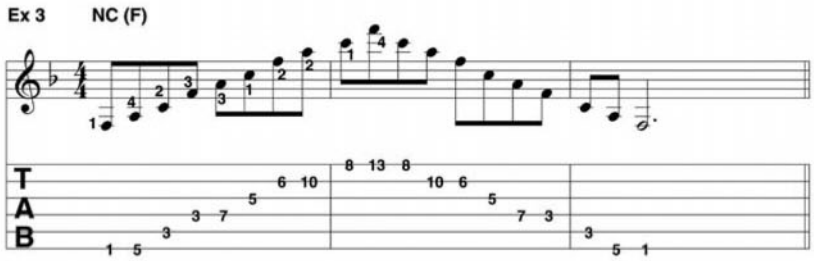

## 2 F MAJOR ARPEGGIO

4/4 TIME

**This time we're going to tackle a two-octave major arpeggio, and this time in the thrilling key of F. Moving from the first to the second notes requires a stretch out of position. Remember that the idea is to play this as smoothly as possible, with no drop in the tempo. Start slowly, and only begin to speed up when it's completely smooth.**

## 3 THREE-OCTAVE ARPEGGIO

4/4 TIME

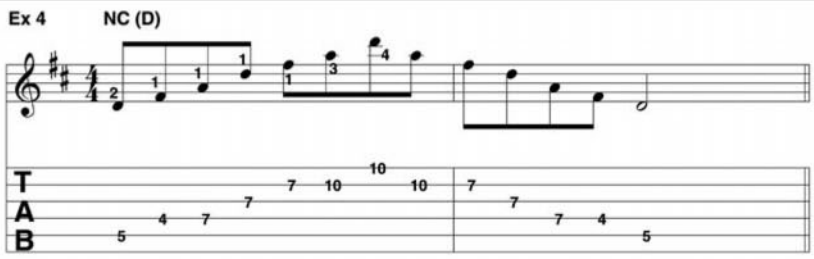
**This three-octave F major arpeggio is a similar pattern to Exercise 1, but it doesn't start on an open string. Once you're familiar with this, carry on moving up the fretboard one fret at a time. If you don't have a cutaway and you run out of frets, use the two-octave pattern in Ex 2 or the two-octave pattern in Ex 4 with the root on the fifth string. The idea is to be able to play a major arpeggio in every key over the whole fingerboard.**




## 4 TWO-OCTAVE ARPEGGIO

4/4 TIME

**This two-octave D major arpeggio starts on the fifth string. The middle part has three notes at the seventh fret, which should all be fretted by the first finger; in order to get a smooth change from one note to the next and to have only one note sounding at a time, the first finger has to be placed over all three notes then gently 'rolled' both on the way up and on the way down. Do try playing to a metronome, by the way. With quavers as written, that's two notes to each click; if you play this as triplets, that's three notes to the click; then finish up with semiquavers, four notes to each click. These are not the only ways of playing these arpeggios, of course. Feel free to experiment with other ways of approaching them, both in terms of where the notes are fretted and the fingers used to fret them.**



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**Fender** 2004 Anniversary Strat, two-tone sunburst, maple board, gold hardware, pristine, £1350. Rothwell Hellbender, F1 booster, Arion Stereo Chorus, Boss power supply, pedals mounted, £180, home use only. Tel: Tony 01442 876740, Herts

**Vintage** V56 guitar, antique white, mint, £100. Indie Super T type, black/grey, excellent, £125, buyer collects. Tel: Stephen 07954 138553, Preston

**Blackstar** 2x10" 5W amp, two channel, ISF, reverb, brand new, never been used, £250. Tel: 01255 435967, Essex

**Godin** Multiac Jazz, spruce, excellent condition, with Godin hard case. £1000. Tel: 07738 227477, London

**Martin** DC-Aura dreadnought cutaway 2008, solid rosewood b/s, solid sitka top, Aura system, excellent, contact Phil, £1600. Tel: 07951 951431 or email spacefish188@yahoo.com, Biggin Hill

**Fender** Stratocaster, 1986, Japanese, big headstock, creamy white, w/rosewood neck, outstanding condition, superb players guitar, bargain, £500. Tel: 07889 031482 or email mjd915@hotmail.co.uk, Bucks

**Gibson** Les Paul Studio 1984, dot fretboard, fitted Dimarzios, £625 ono. Gibson 1967 EB-3, big issue – no original case, £2200. Tel: 07773 276815

**Martin** D-42, great sound, flagship of Martin dreadnoughts, bright inlays for the D-42, case upgraded to Geib 5 Star, all as new, £2800. Tel: 07686 263587

**Gibson** SG Robot (2008) cherry, Gibson hard case, both mint condition, very little playing, new battery, serial 024980311, £749 ono. Tel: Ross 075570 42548

**Hofner** President blonde 1959, No 13, in excellent condition for age, one pickup rewired, great example, £1200 ono. Tel: 07807 462909, Cambs

**PRS** SE Santana Limited Edition, quilt top with 25th anniversary hard case, three years old, excellent, £595, consider swap or p/ex quality guitar amp. Tel: Dave 07512 695626, Worcs

**Epiphone** Ultra 339, mint condition, £350. Ashdown bass Suboctave Plus Pedal £40. JSH GM55 'Elvis' mic £25. Tel: 07710 147305, Beds

**Fender** '57 reissue Strat, crafted in Japan 2003, fiesta red, immaculate, original, barely played, hard case, £650 Tel: 07802 571278

**Vox** VBM1 Brian May Special 10W amp, Ltd replica of Brain May's Deacy amp, excellent condition with manual and box, £100. Tel: Tom 01207 500 939, Co Durham

**Marshall** JMP Master Volume 50W combo 2x12", fantastic tone, £595. Orange Tiny Terror, £195. Tel: 01142 551785, Sheffield

**Fender** USA Telecaster, midnight candy, Stagg case in vgc, £750 ono. Tel: 01603 502090, Norwich

**Seagull** Maritime SWS Q1 electro-acoustic, solid top, solid rosewood b/s, Quantum electrics, mint, padded Seagull bag, 10W amp, £550. Tel: 0114 2831610 or 07948 418442, Sheffield

**Orville** by Gibson Les Paul Junior DC, TV yellow, Johnny Thunders style, £875. Japanese Fender Strat, red, £265. Seymour Duncan Antiquity P90, £75. Tel: Paul 01785 211769, Stafford

**Fender** Hot Rod Deluxe III, unused, £575 ono. Roland Cube 80XL £180, home use only. Takamine G Series electro-acoustic, £180, immaculate, hardly used. Tel: Tony 01442 876740, Herts

**Tokai** 1978 Silverstar S-type, cream with maple fretboard, made in Japan, brass nut and saddles, superb condition, £650. Tel: 01386 861873

**Vox** AC30 top boost reverb, 1979, McKenzie speakers, good condition with footswitch and cover, £750. Tel: John 01228 534889, Cumbria

**Gibson** Les Paul Trad, 2012, Heritage cherry sunburst, home use only, unplayed condition, great tone, Gibson hard case. £1300 ono. Tel: Graham 07766 170808, South Staffs

**Catania** Carmelo ERA1 thin archtop, £175. Salvador Ibanez ukulele in croc. case, £150. Dot fretboard Les Paul Studio, fitted DiMarzios, £595. Sunburst Thunderbird 76, £2700. Tel: 07773 276815

**Ampeg** L.Guitar V9/SSt Altec stack. V4/V2 stacks. Gu12 Jensen combo. All GWO documented, suit Stones or Faces tribute. Reasonable offers invited. Tel: 01179 770323, Bristol

**PRS** McCarty pickups, set of two, with chrome covers, £150. Steve Vai Bad Horsie Wah pedal, £50. Tel: Colin 07732 947131, Epsom

**Collings** I-35LC, fantastic, faded cherry, as new, mint condition. With deluxe original case, £2400. Tel: 0047 93035501 or email torsteina27@gmail.com

**Orange** Rocker 30 1x12" combo, footswitch, cover, light use, immac, £375 + p&p, ultimate Orange sound. Tel: Tony 01296 738486, tony.cox7@btinternet.com, North Bucks

**Ibanez** K5 Fieldy Signature Bass, mahogany body, walnut top and back, wenge/bubinga neck, rosewood fretboard, good condition with OHSC, £400. Tel: 07779 023883 or email pdommett@me.com

**TwinStomp** active A/B-Y pedal. as new, boxed, instructions, £85. Tel: 0114 2556185, Sheffield area

**Fender** 1966 Jazz Special Bass, worn with age and use, photos available, sensible offers. Tel: 01572 771132, Leicestershire

**Marshall** Vintage Modern 50W head and 425A 4x12" cabinet, purple, 2007 issue, fantastic vintage sound, padded Marshall covers, pedal, vgc, owner retiring, £695. Tel: 01943 465357

**Godin** Artisan TC Signature model, stunning amber quilt maple top, ebony board, gold hardware, Blade pickups, coil tap, immaculate, Godin case, £595. Tel: 01386 861873

**Mesa/Boogie** Transatlantic TA15 head, two channels, five modes, 5/15/25 watts. As new condition, with carry bag, footswitch, manual, £650. Tel: Steve 07933 799017 or email smallpot@virginmedia.com, Beds

**Fender** 1990 Clapton Stratocaster in candy apple green, owned from new. Consider p/x for MIM CP Jazzmaster, Robin Ranger or Duesenberg CC, £800. Tel: Brian 07904 184047

**Gibson** USA Les Paul Junior Billie Joe Armstrong, single cut, sunburst, all original, mint, Gibson BJA Leopard hard case. £1000, Jesse, London. Tel: 07472 694929 or email jesseappleton@hotmail.com

**Gibson** 1958 ES-125T, good condition for age, complete with hard case, £1250 ono. Tel: Clive 07721 458523 or email clive.hoops@virgin.net, Plymouth

**Fender** 2000 American Traditional Strat, serial N902272, black, near mint, never gigged, no case. £450. Fender M80 amp (non-valve), £140. Tel: 01322 347641, near Dartford, Kent

**Gibson** 1978 ES-175D vintage sunburst, vgc, original hard case and receipt, £2500. Vox AC30, 12 months old, immaculate, gigged twice, £750. Celestion Greenback speakers, £650. Tel: 07980 035140, Sheffield

**Fender** 100W FM 2x12", as new, £130. Peavey Predator, £120. Squier Telecaster, rough looking but good, £90. Two 12" Celestion speakers, as new, £50. Tel: 07830 444829, Derby

**Trace Elliot** Pro UK bass rig, vgc: bottom cab 1x18" 300W, top 2x10" plus horn 200W, with 'tuff' covers. Two amps Trace Elliott with EQ, 150W. New, unused, Ashdown MAG 300W, offers. Tel: Steve 01256 780025, Basingstoke

**Boss** Micro Cube, effects and amp models, ideal practice or busking, excellent condition, mains/battery, £45. Also various Tele pickups from £15 each. Tel: 01429 296413, Teesside

**Audition** vintage amp, stored many years, piggyback model, trannie, needs a switch clean, 15 watts-ish, buyer collects, £50, Tel: 01582 882160, Beds

**Trace Elliot** GP7 4x10" bass combo, original British built, probably mid-'80s, £150. Call Graham 01634 232177

**Gibson** ES-135, deep red, P100 pickups, superb, great blues/rock guitar, beautiful looks and sounds, padded Gibson gig bag, £995. Tel: 07981 569027, Cheltenham

**Fender** Vintage Reissue '57 Strat, two colour sunburst, Bare Knuckle pickups, home use only, tweed case, bridge cover, £800, photos. Tel: Simon 07949 192278.

**Fender** Strat, Custom Shop '62 Relic Tone Machine, surf green, rosewood board, John Cruz pickups, vintage brown case, candy, certificate, six months old. Save £700: £1850. Tel: 01255 435967, Essex

**Fender** Robert Cray Strat, hardtail, sunburst, mint, £550. Fender Lite Ash Tele, natural, mint, £350. Takamine EG334C electro-acoustic, mint with hard case, £400. Tel: Richard 02392 348487, Portsmouth

**Orange** MT20 Micro Terror amp and Orange PPC108 lead guitar head speaker cab, new, boxed, never used, £130. Tel: 07717 671744, Bristol

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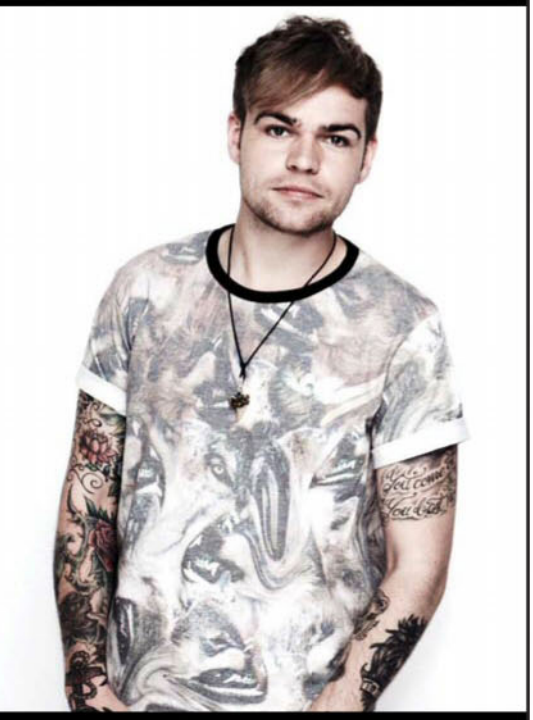

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**Vintage** 1964 Fender Musicmaster II, 100 per cent original with OHSC. Excellent for age with no issues. Case has a bump. £1200 ono. Buyer collect, Preston, Lancashire. Email: twentyhertz@twentyhertz.co.uk

**Various** electric guitars for sale, mostly Fenders and Gibsons. Tel: 07887 952916 for info, South Cumbria area

**Yamaha** SG1000, made in Japan 1993, original hard case, brown sunburst with gold hardware, mint apart from one small ding to neck, £900. Tel: Mick 07802 571278, Northants

**Camps** Naci electro-acoustic guitar, left-handed, Fishman pickup, great condition, buyer collects, £250. Tel: 07791 219506 Thame, Oxon

**Fender** American Vintage reissue '52 Tele Special, 1999. Two colour sunburst, gold hardware, Tolex case, leather strap etc, mint, very rare, £1250. Tel: Mick 07802 571278, Northants

**Gibson** SG 61 Reissue, 2001, Heritage cherry, lyre vibrato, vgc, pics on request, with tan Gibson hard case, £1000. Email: kennethlanglands@gmail.com, Beds

**Burns** Marvin 40th Anniversary 2004, very little home use only, mint with all case candy, signed certificate, £950 ono. Tel: Steve 01246 280299, Chesterfield

**Tokai** Goldstar Sound, R/N, rare, pink metallic, good, £450. Carvin Nomad combo 50W, tweed, good, £350. Tel: Richard 02392 348487, Portsmouth

**Gibson** ES-335, 2008, cherry red plain top, mint, home use only, cased with Custom Shop certificate, £1350 ovno. Tel: Geoff 0121 358 2704, Birmingham

**Mesa** Boogie Maverick 2x12" 35W class A combo amp. Two distinctive channels, great sounds, blond, c/w footswitch, manual, custom cover, excellent condition, £895. 01513 365450, Cheshire

**Fender** Telecaster reissue of 1950s blackguard, as new. Fender tweed case. £700. Tel Jon 01458 211173, Somerset

**Ayers** ACM single-cut auditorium acoustic, luthier designed by Gerard Gilet, all solid woods, wonderful warm sound, semi-solid case, £300 + p&p. Tel: Tony 01296738486 or email tony.cox7@btinternet.com, North Bucks.

**Laney** VC30 210 30W valve combo, 2x10 Jensen speakers, excellent condition, home use only, £300 ono. Call Graham on 07780 907361, Norwich

**Guitar** Magazine, every single issue, pristine, £150 the lot, buyer collects. Tel Jon 01458 211173, Somerset

**Fender** Mustang Pawn Shop Special, candy apple red , hard case, excellent £400 ono. Email hunkydory@tiscali.co.uk or call 01282 868166, Lancs

**Taylor** 314ce, 2005, excellent, nicely matured, great with no issues, original case. Have photos, £850. Tel Mike 07799 640523 or email mjshaw@btinternet.com, Sussex

**Fender** 62 reissue Custom Tele, sunburst, as new with gig bag, £850. Fender Newporter electro-acoustic 12-string, as new, hard case, £250. Te: 0208 875 6118, London

**Gibson** 1976 Limited Edition Les Paul Specials: single cut '55' sunburst; double cut '58' TV yellow, £3500. Pair WEM 2x12" cabs circa 1973, £150. Laney RBW200 bass combo, £89. Tel: 07773 276815, Westmorland

## WANTED

**Fender** soft-V neck for Baja Tele. Must be very good to new condition. Tel: 01429 296413, Teesside

**Music Man** 1x12" combo, 65W or 75W twin channel, other models considered. Tel: Peter 0208 977 7228

**Vintage** Paradise guitar. Txt/call: Andy 07944 651798 or email delavigne@btinternet.com

**Fender** Highway One Tele, pref sunburst, excellent condition. Tel: 01306 740841, Surrey

**Award-Session** Stockton amp wanted. Tel: 07887 972019, Lanarkshire

**Brown-haired** bassist for hard rock band. Must have long hair and be over 22. Contact Gismus@aol.com

**Yamaha** SG200, pearl white. Tel/txt: 07710 161598 or email Chris-r1968@hotmail.co.uk

**Fender** Tweed '50s Champ, Princeton or Deluxe amp, must be original. Tel: 0151 638 9567, Cheshire area

**Egnator** Rebel 30 combo wanted, also Roland-ready Strat, Mexican, white, must be good condition, pref London. Tel: Mick 020 8530 1208

**Gibson** 2008 50th Anniversary Explorer DSX50 brimstone, excellent to mint, w/case. Also: orig case for Gibson Gothic Explorer. Tel: Tony 01535 606002 or info@telluris.info

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# Barrie Cadogan

## Little Barrie/Primal Scream

Garage rock, funk and soul, deep psychedelia, proto-punk, elemental blues and classic jangle? Yup, it all makes perfect sense...

Primal Scream sideman Barrie Cadogan may travel the world playing arenas and huge festivals, but his London-based trio Little Barrie is still very close to his heart. The band's fourth album, *Shadow,* ploughs a slightly darker furrow than the surfy garage-psyche of previous outings, and the songs have been sequenced to give a cinematic, soundtrack feel while retaining all the kinetic energy of Little Barrie's explosive live shows. Recorded at ex-Orange Juice man Edwyn Collins' studio with the great man himself at the desk, the band seem to have found a new gear. Barrie's 1962 hollowbody Gibson ES-330 is still his number one guitar, but his custom-built Dubreuille, a '65 Fender Jazzmaster and Edwyn's battered '63 Strat all helped to weave atmospheric leadlines across an inspired new chapter in the Cadogan story.

### The Stone Roses

**THE STONE ROSES**

John Squire was the starting point for me – he made me want to play. It was soulful and fluid, but it was all in the way he put his guitar around the

vocals and supported the song. The outro to *I Am The Resurrection* where he cuts loose was a big thing for me. From the cleaner funky chops to the fuzz solo, it's just so exciting.

### The Jimi Hendrix Experience

**ELECTRIC LADYLAND**

My dad lent me his original vinyl Hendrix LPs, and I think this is my favourite album of all time. I love the dark mood. This is the one where he really

expanded. It's steeped in the blues, with that depth of feeling, but it's so modern and the songs are all brilliant. It's as emotional as anybody has ever got on the guitar.

### The Stooges

**FUN HOUSE**

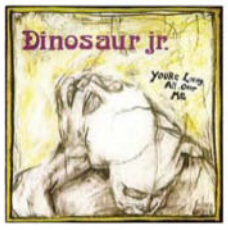
This was years ahead of its time. They pioneered punk, and Iggy Pop was the template for a frontman. No one was that extreme at this point.

Ron Asheton's crude, brutal guitar stripped things down to the bare minimum. The riffs, the repetition and the groove are hypnotic. I love the energy and attitude.

### Dinosaur Jr

**YOU'RE LIVING ALL OVER ME**

The first time I ever heard screechy Big Muff or fuzz-wah guitar. J Mascis seemed to fuse a hint of the Stooges with the melodic side of someone




like Neil Young. Truly explosive, with an incredibly powerful attack, but with real melody too. His solos actually seem to have a context instead of noodling on forever.

### James Brown

**LIVE AT THE APOLLO II**

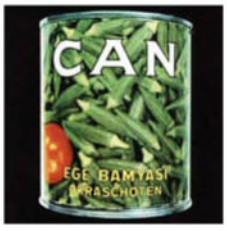
The first Apollo record is the most famous, but on this double LP there's a side where he's really pioneering the funk thing, and the groove is just

unbelievable. I think Jimmy Nolan and the other guitarist were using cheap Vox guitars, but they're masters. The combination of the rhythm section and the guitars is stunning.

### Can

**EGE BAMYASI**

Amazing Krautrock fronted by the Japanese singer Damo Suzuki. With a basic rock band setup, they created something completely different. The




bassist studied under the composer Stockhausen, and Michael Karoli's' guitar style is unique. He has a violin-like quality to his solos... nobody else sounds like him.

### Howlin' Wolf

**MOANIN' IN THE MOONLIGHT**

Released in 1959, but some of it was recorded with Sam Phillips in Memphis as early as 1951. I love Hubert Sumlin, but Willie Johnson was the guitar

player in Memphis and his distorted, saturated guitar is crude as hell and so rebellious and exciting. Wolf was a real pioneer of the rock band setup with bass and overdriven guitar.

### MC5

**HIGH TIME**

I love all three of the MC5 albums but the songs on here are amazing – *Sister Ann* is as good an eight minutes as you'll ever hear on any record.

The interplay between the two guitar players, Wayne Kramer and Fred 'Sonic' Smith, is fantastic. The fire and explosiveness and energy of that band was almost too much.

### The Smiths

**HATFUL OF HOLLOW**

There's great 'Peel session' type versions of their songs on this – *What Difference Does It Make* blew my mind. It's all got that raw element. Johnny

Marr is still one of my favourite guitar players... he developed a totally original guitar style at a really young age and managed to innovate on some truly great pop records.

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